

STEPPING STONES YOUTH HOME ADVISORY COMMITTEE



***Every youth deserves a safe and healthy place to live.
Our community will work to provide healthy housing
options for all youth without a home.***

THREE YEAR PILOT PROPOSAL

Youth experiencing homelessness were first identified as a priority target group in the development of the Wood Buffalo Community Plan on Homelessness and Affordable Housing in 2004. Youth homelessness now ranks as one of the top four Priority Areas in the 2007 – 2010 Community Plan.

In January 2007, the Youth Shelter sub-committee of the Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee was struck to enumerate youth experiencing homelessness in the Fort McMurray region, and to determine the appropriate shelter and support services required to effectively address their needs. The Committee developed a survey to assess the circumstances experienced by youth when they leave home.

In our point-in-time survey of 2,200 youths conducted May 2007, 65 young people reported being homeless, defined as youth who have been abandoned by the guardians responsible for their care or who have left their homes without notice or guardian consent, and who have no permanent place of residence. The primary cause of youth homelessness was attributed to addictions and/or violence or conflict in their family homes. Further, the survey identified a core group of homeless youth who continue to attend school and/or work part-time or full-time in order to support themselves.

The findings of homeless status were most prevalent among 14-17 year olds, and highlight a correlation between youth homelessness and family conflict. Findings reflect that youth from care are over-represented in the local youth homeless population and illustrate that homeless youth are placing themselves in unsafe and/or undesirable and even criminal situations when they choose or are required to leave home. Youth are in need of supports to address family conflict and family breakdown, and also to deal with youth addictions and cope with guardian addictions.

The Youth Shelter sub-committee evolved into the **Stepping Stones Youth Home Advisory Committee** which has representation from a wide variety of community organizations and individuals who believe all youth deserve a safe and healthy place to live. As a community, it is our responsibility to establish the social safety nets required to ensure that all of our citizens – including youth – feel safe and secure within our society.

In August 2007, the Committee completed an Expression of Interest to operators of youth homeless-centred services. Given the challenges faced by our local service providers, the only response to the Expression of Interest came from Wood's Homes, located in Calgary. The Advisory Committee moved forward to engage Wood's Homes in coming to our community and providing the much-needed services for our youth. The long term vision is for the community to build capacity and take over the operation of the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative, with continuing mentorship and expertise from Wood's Homes.

Our philosophy is based on the premise that every youth deserves a safe and healthy place to live. Further, it recognizes that youth require services and supports to address barriers impeding their housing stability.

The goal of this Initiative is to ensure youth housing stability by developing a Home that is linked to outreach services and programs in order to meet the varied needs of youth experiencing homelessness in Fort McMurray.

STEPPING STONES YOUTH SERVICES INITIATIVE

To be operated by Wood's Homes in accord with the Stepping Stones Youth Home Advisory Committee

The operational model has three components:

- Outreach and Crisis Support Service
- Emergency Shelter Service
- Stabilization and Transitional Service

This model is an adaptation of other street service programs in Calgary (operated by Wood's Homes for over 15 years) and other parts of Canada. This graduated and multi-component approach targets youth, supports them in their life decision-making and then offers services to move from homelessness or at-risk status towards housing independence and self reliance.

Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative's operational model is based on Crisis Intervention theory, Youth Resiliency theory and an Ecological Model of service delivery. Additional models such as the Foyer Service Delivery Model assist with addressing barriers that prevent youth from remaining in, or reintegrating back into, the home, school, or community environment. The provision of a "network of care" connects youth to a variety of services and supports such as education, training, life skills, counselling, etc. The timing of support for these youth is dependent upon their readiness to make connection with caring adults and their community.

Outreach and Crisis Support Service

The Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative - Outreach and Crisis Support Program is composed of two elements:

Storefront – A small, easily accessible "storefront" space with the primary goal to provide a place for youth to connect during day hours. A place where young people can be safe, seek help and assistance with a variety of essential needs (food, laundry, showers, bus tickets) and also assistance to leave the street when they are ready. Outreach workers would operate from here and connect to the Home.

Mobile Outreach Service - Some at-risk youth are hesitant to access help. Connecting with youth, offering support and establishing relationships is the work of the Stepping Stones Mobile Outreach Worker. Because youth tend to congregate in specific areas of the city, this work is facilitated through the use of an outreach van.

The van will travel around town and provide support, encouragement and assistance with making change. Services such as hot beverages, blankets, band aids, condoms, etc. and transportation to essential services (as appropriate) will be provided. The van can connect youth to local resources and transfer them directly to the Youth Home (see below) or home to their parents or caregiver, if requested.

This outreach service is an important component of a comprehensive strategy to intervene successfully in the lives of high risk youth.

Emergency Shelter Service

A shelter is simply that – a place to lay your head for a night when you have nowhere else to go, no money, and no resources to draw upon. Typically, young people who access a shelter have no plan and little desire to make one. An effective emergency shelter applies very little pressure - come in, get a bit of information, have a hot meal, and tell us your story if you want. You can leave tomorrow and never come back, or leave and ask for help to return. Two or three visits gives staff the permission to ask what the plan might be, where the young person comes from and where they are going.

A shelter is not a place to remain for any length of time. Crises usually last 24-72 hours; and that is a time frame in which emergency shelter works well. Young people who are independent on the street (or think they are) respond to shelter services because there is little pressure to “change”, there is minor structure and expectations (beyond good manners and living well in the community) and lots of opportunity to think. Stays with the emergency shelter service are voluntary, and a parent/guardian is notified when youth arrive or leave.

Stabilization / Transition Service

The Stabilization/Transition Services provide longer-term residential placements that include assistance with: family conflict resolution / mediation, accessing affordable housing, finding employment, securing financial assistance, enrolling in educational programs, and similar activities.

Stabilization is a place to be, but not a place to stay. Staying time is limited to 3-7 days . The stabilization component may focus on the resolution of uncomplicated family conflict - parents and their youth have the opportunity to take a break from their immediate crisis, with parents knowing that their child is staying in a safe environment. The youth’s stay can be up to seven days, depending upon the severity of the family conflict. The stabilization component can also provide mediation services that emphasize crisis diffusion, conflict resolution and mending of relationships.

Stabilization can also be a place to “chill out” from another placement or think about giving up an addiction, making new goals for change, getting over a temper tantrum, calming down from being violent with parents or peers (to name a few examples). However, this is not a place to languish and live; it is a place to rest for a time, calm down and gather strength to face the challenges ahead.

The Transitional component of the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative is different yet again. This program component allows youth who are ready to seriously consider leaving the streets to have some time to access support and begin the process. A transitional stay can be up to 60 days, with the possibility of an extension up to 30 days in certain cases. With the support of Stepping Stones staff this transitional component allows the youth to connect with social services agencies, employment services, medical services, mental health services, and plan for permanent housing, as well as re-establish connections with family where possible. The Stepping Stones Initiative maintains linkages with other youth-serving agencies to ensure efficient and effective service delivery.

Stabilization and Transitional beds are limited. Young people must be known to the staff and screened for interest and readiness for change. Ideally they have support from family members or other involved caregivers who are prepared to share in the responsibility for the future of each young person.

The Stepping Stones Youth Home

The 950 square foot residence situated in a quiet neighbourhood is the ideal place for youth to feel safe and secure, while receiving and participating in the supportive services available to them. The Home will be accessible for both male and female homeless youth between the ages of 12-17. The operation of the home will be from 5pm – 9am, seven days a week.

The home will provide seven beds in total. The seven beds will have the flexibility to move from emergency to stabilization / transitional beds as required. The emergency shelter beds will be located on the lower level, while the stabilization and transitional beds will be located on the upper level and used when determined. The Home will have two floors renovated based on direct input from Wood's Homes to ensure ease of use, safety and security of the staff and youth. Wood's Homes expects to offer over 1,600 emergency shelter bed nights, or 320 client visits, in the first year of operation.

During the day, the young people who occupy the Stabilization/Transitional beds will be expected to be in school, working (or looking for work) and/or accessing support services and programming. Examples of formal or informal programming for youth in these beds could be employment counselling, mental health services, addictions and family counselling. Life skills and household management will also ensure youth have the skills required to transition to independent living where appropriate. Wood's Homes anticipates 15-20 youth to utilize the Transitional and Stabilization component in the first year of operation.

Case planning will be developed in collaboration with local helping agencies. This component is similar to the Supportive Transitional Housing Team model (STHT) and provides wrap around services to help individuals with complex barriers access housing. Agencies with representation on the Advisory Committee, such as Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation, Family and Community Support Services, AADAC, Child and Family Service Authority, etc. are also part of the STHT. This Team is involved in discussions to modify the existing case management framework to include youth case management.

Referrals

Van and Outreach:

Any young person is welcome to access the outreach van and the Stepping Stones Youth Home. The Stepping Stones Mobile Outreach Worker will maintain contact with youth who are living on the streets, "couch surfing" or living in questionable situations and wish to access the shelter. When an opening becomes available, youth who are motivated to participate in the shelter program will be offered a bed.

Emergency Shelter:

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), school guidance counsellors, concerned community members who know of a youth in need and parents can all make referrals to the shelter beds at the Home. Youth may also self-refer. Since there are a limited number of youth housed in the seven bed facility, referrals are dealt with on a first-come, first-served basis.

Stabilization/Transition Services:

Referrals will be encouraged and accepted from local schools and agencies such as Family Service Agency/Family Community Support Services, CFSA, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Addiction Commission, RCMP, local adult shelters, religious organizations, concerned citizens and most important - self referral.

Budget

The Stepping Stones Youth Home Advisory Committee worked with Wood's Homes to develop the operational model and budget for the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative based on Fort McMurray's influencing factors.

The Initiative's unique operational model provides more than a shelter - it provides the supports needed to address the underlying causes and effects of youth homelessness. The model is rooted in best practice and will generate a proven track record in successfully and permanently helping youth overcome barriers to their housing instability over time.

The Stepping Stones Youth Home Advisory Committee and Wood's Homes have secured core operational dollars on a three year commitment from:

Province of Alberta, via Child and Family Services Authority - \$600,000 per year for 3 years

United Way of Fort McMurray - \$300,000 per year for 3 years

Wood's Homes also received \$200,000 in start up seed funding from the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Giving

The Stepping Stones Youth Home Advisory Committee presents the opportunity for key, major and personal giving in benefit of the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative. The Initiative is comprised of Outreach, Emergency Shelter and Stabilization/Transition services for our community's homeless and at-risk youth, centered on a residential environment.

Donors may choose one of the following levels of giving:

Stone: Contributions of \$50,000

Recognition Opportunities:

- Feature in media package
- Public acknowledgement of contribution at Donor Recognition Event
- Gift of appreciation for display
- Personalized thank you

Rock: Contributions of \$20,000

Recognition Opportunities:

- Inclusion in media package
- Public acknowledgement at Donor Recognition Event
- Keepsake of appreciation for display
- Personalized thank you

Pebble: Contributions of \$1,000 to \$5,000

Recognition Opportunities:

- Mention in media package
- Personalized thank-you

The contribution campaign will close on December 12, 2008. Wood's Homes Foundation will be the recipient of funds and is a registered charity; therefore charitable receipts for tax purposes can be issued. The media package includes local radio and print medium, with donor recognition/awareness programming running in the spring and fall of 2009.

Partial staffing, outreach and programming will begin in late 2008, and the Youth Home is anticipated to open in April 2009. A Donor Recognition Event will be held in conjunction with the opening of the Home.

The Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative is focused on the principle that every youth deserves a safe and healthy place to live. With your help, our community will endeavour to reduce the cause and effect of youth homelessness in our region.

MEDIA PACKAGE

Stone Donor

- Inclusion in 350 – 30 second Public Service Announcements (70 – 30 second PSA's on each of 5 local radio stations)
- Prominent logo placement in 4 – ¼ page advertisements in the Fort McMurray Today

Rock Donor

- Inclusion in 70 – 30 second Public Service Announcements (14 – 30 second PSA's on each of 5 local radio stations)
- Inclusion of logo in 4 – ¼ page advertisements in the Fort McMurray Today

Pebble Donor

- Inclusion in 14 – 30 second Public Service Announcements (divided between 5 local radio stations)
- Name mention in 4 – ¼ page advertisements in the Fort McMurray Today

Public Service Announcements

Local radio stations Country 93.3, Kaos 91.1, K-Rock 100.5, Mix 103.7 and Rock 97.9 will each run 30 second Public Service Announcements regarding the Stepping Stones Youth Home. The end of each announcement will name donors. It is anticipated the PSA's will run in the spring of 2009 to coincide with the official launch of the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative and opening of the Youth Home.

Fort McMurray Today Advertisements

The Fort McMurray Today will run 4 – ¼ page advertisements featuring logos and names of all who contributed to the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative. The advertisements will announce the official launch of the Initiative and the opening of the Youth Home.

Donor Recognition Event

A Donor Recognition Event will be held in conjunction with the official launch of the Stepping Stones Youth Services Initiative and opening of the Stepping Stones Youth Home in April 2009. Media partners will be invited to attend, and Stone and Rock donors will be acknowledged with a gift or keepsake in appreciation of contributions.