

**CONSEIL  
JEUNESSE  
DE MONTRÉAL**

# YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOMELESSNESS

**REVEALING A HIDDEN REALITY**

**ABSTRACT OF THE POLICY PAPER ON PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN MONTRÉAL**

Montréal 

## CONSEIL JEUNESSE DE MONTRÉAL

The Conseil jeunesse de Montréal (CJM) is an advisory board that was created by the City of Montréal in February 2003 to ensure fuller consideration of the concerns of young Montrealers between the ages of 12 and 30 and to involve young Montrealers in the decision-making process around youth issues.

The Conseil is made up of fifteen members who are representative of the geographic, linguistic, cultural and social diversity of the city's youth, and is mandated with regularly advising the mayor and the executive committee on all youth-related issues and ensuring the city administration takes youth concerns into account in its decision-making process

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This abstract was prepared in 2016, the Thirteenth year of the Conseil jeunesse de Montréal's existence, and was adopted by its members on November 23, 2016

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Abstract of the Opinion

**Young People and Homelessness: Revealing a Hidden Reality**

Abstract of the Opinion on Preventing Youth Homelessness in Montréal

Benoit Décary-Secours

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why the interest in preventing homelessness among young people? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Profile of the Situation .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.1 What should be understood by “youth homelessness”? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.2 Youth homelessness: toward a qualitative definition of the phenomenon.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.3 Devising preventive approaches within the City’s jurisdiction and competency: investigation methodology .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Summary of Analytical Results .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1 Expand knowledge of the new realities of youth homelessness in Montréal. 8</b>	
<b>2.2 Recommendations for enhancing knowledge of youth homelessness.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.3 The City and proximity governance: correcting institutionally cumbersome approaches.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.3.1 Building the first bonds of trust: valuing and supporting street work.....	11
2.3.2 Recommendations on street work.....	12
2.3.3 Flexible social and occupational integration projects for young people .....	12
2.3.4 Recommendations on social and occupational integration .....	13
2.3.5 The right to housing and sharing of space: housing adapted to the young people’s reality.....	13
2.3.6 Recommendations on housing .....	14
<b>3. General Recommendations.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4. Summary of Recommendations .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>18</b>

## Introduction

### Why the interest in preventing youth homelessness?

Statistics show that some 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year, and approximately 20 percent are under the age of 25 (Gaetz, 2014a). The problem of youth homelessness arose in the early 1980s in Québec, when street youth began to gather in groups in some areas of downtown Montréal and Québec City. They became both a “visible” and a noisy problem, as their disorder was disturbing. Today, while homeless youth are less visible in Montréal’s streets, the phenomenon has not disappeared completely: professional workers are noting increased use of their services as well as a shift in the profile of the young people approaching them.

This opinion was developed as government institutions began placing new importance on the battle against homelessness, and especially its prevention. In 2014, the Gouvernement du Québec adopted the first province-wide policy to battle homelessness, *Ensemble, pour éviter la rue et en sortir*. This policy is accompanied by the 2015-2020 inter-ministry homelessness action plan, *Mobilisés et engagés pour prévenir et réduire l’itinérance*. Montréal has also drawn up a 2014-2017 action plan – *Parce que la rue est une impasse*. The purpose of this opinion is to contribute to these collective efforts focused on preventing homelessness, while stressing the need to factor in the specific realities faced by young people.

\* \* \*

Homelessness, youth and prevention: three factors very loaded with meaning but also lacking a common, consolidated definition. Each of these words underscores an image, clichés and a prevailing profile. Homelessness elicits the stereotype of a drunk dressed in rags and sleeping on the sidewalk. Youth is the time for breaking rules and challenging authority. Finally, prevention consists of a series of measures taken to counter a risk, danger or problem. These images guide the way we think about youth homelessness and determine the intervention practices to be adopted. By definition, “prevention” refers to more than just those provisions instituted to avoid a problem, and includes the “unreasonable feeling of attraction or repulsion prior to any review”<sup>1</sup> or a “preconceived opinion, usually negative, about someone or something.”<sup>2</sup> Preventing youth

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<sup>1</sup> “Prevention,” [translated from] *Le nouveau Petit Robert de la langue française*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> “Prevention,” [translated from] *Larousse* on line (larousse.fr), 2016.

homelessness first requires work to determine the reality faced by young street people in Montréal.

The first part of this opinion produces a profile of the situation. What do we know about the reality of young street people in Montréal? What statistics and data are available? What is young people's experience of homelessness and what factors drive them into the street? Are certain subcategories over-represented among young street people? After observing a defining flow, we discuss the various ways to view the problem of homeless young people and their consequences on intervention and prevention practices.

The second part of the opinion focuses on practical prevention solutions for Montréal. In light of our interviews with the heads of intervention agencies working with marginal youth, we target three areas of activity in which the City of Montréal can foster a preventive approach: street work, social and occupational inclusion, and housing. While these fields of action are not new areas of intervention *per se*, we propose innovative ways of implementing them based on examples drawn from Montréal, Canada and abroad. The final part of the opinion lists the recommendations submitted to the City of Montréal for preventing homelessness among young people.

## **1. Profile of the Situation**

### *1.1 What should be understood by "youth homelessness"?*

The lack of a clear, shared definition of "homelessness," "youth" and even "prevention" remains a fundamental characteristic of the literature on the subject. Recognizing the need to establish a clear, standard definition of homelessness, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, in conjunction with various national, regional and local officials, developed a *Canadian Definition of Homelessness* in 2012. This definition is the result of an extensive survey of the literature as well as the experiences of authorities in the areas of research, policy and intervention.<sup>3</sup> Based on this definition,

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, formerly the Canadian Homelessness Research Network brought together a working group of leaders from the research, policy and practices sectors to draft, refine and test a new definition. The COH/OCI working group included Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Director, Canadian Homelessness Research Network, York University; Carolann Barr, Executive Director, Chez toit; Anita Friesen, Senior Policy Advisor, Policy and Program Planning, Family Violence Prevention and Homeless Supports, Alberta Human Services; Bradley Harris, Social Services Adviser, Salvation Army; Charlie Hill, Executive Director, National Aboriginal Housing Association; Dr. Kathy Kovacs-Burns, Assistant Director, Health Sciences Council, University of Alberta; Dr. Bernie Pauly, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, University of Victoria; Bruce Pearce, President, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association;

*Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing. (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2012: 1).*

This definition by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness has the advantage of including less visible homelessness situations (people with temporary housing and at risk) and defining subcategories that reflect the various realities of homelessness. One difficulty of studying youth homelessness is the fact it is often masked by survival strategies that lend it a certain invisibility: staying with friends or in squats<sup>4</sup> rather than in shelters, refusal to self-identify with the image of homeless adults, etc.

One of the most frequent typologies for categorizing the path of young street people is based on time spent without a home and the varying “visibility” of homelessness.

- **Chronic homelessness** refers to the situation those who have experienced repeated episodes of homelessness and have spent long periods in the street. Canada’s chronic homeless population ranges between 2 and 4 percent (Aubry *et al.*, 2013). This is the most visible face of homelessness.
- **Episodic homelessness** refers to the situation of people who alternate between having a home and living in the street. This includes individuals who become and cease to be homeless several times over a three-year period. In Canada, these people account for about 9 percent of the homeless population (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013).
- **So-called “situational” homelessness** is both the least visible and most frequent of homeless situations. It refers to the situation of people momentarily without a home who subsequently manage to find a new home. These individuals **tend to be younger** and have fewer complex problems involving mental health, addiction and other medical problems.

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Alina Turner, Vice-President, Strategy, Calgary Homeless Foundation; Allyson Marsolais, Project Director, Canadian Homelessness Research Network.

<sup>4</sup> A “squat” refers to an abandoned structure slated for demolition, illegally occupied by homeless people.

Most homeless people belong to this third category. **Gaetz estimates that in Canada, 81 to 86 percent of homeless youth are in a situation of invisible and situational homelessness** (Gaetz, 2014a: 16). The drawbacks of attempts to count the homeless population, especially homeless youth, are specifically due to this invisibility of a mobile population.

In March 2015, the City of Montréal conducted a time-specific census to determine how many homeless people were living on its streets. Commissioned by the City of Montréal, this exercise was motivated by one of the main findings of Montréal's 2014-2017 homelessness action plan: the glaring lack of data on homelessness. Entitled *I Count MTL 2015*, the exercise counted **3,016 homeless people** in Montréal on the night of March 24, 2015. When these numbers were published in July 2015, the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM) stressed the limited nature of this methodology, which surveyed only chronic homelessness, the most visible form, and minimized the other categories, to which most homeless people belong. RAPSIM Coordinator Pierre Gaudreau stresses that "this type meets the need for a 'specific' number but does not present an accurate profile of homelessness, the number of homeless people or their various realities" (RAPSIM, 2016: 4).

### *1.2 Youth homelessness: toward a qualitative definition of the phenomenon*

In his detailed survey of the literature on youth homelessness, Colombo stresses that quantitative research on the subject of youth homelessness often contributes to portraying these people as "passive victims" suffering the consequences of exclusion (Colombo, 2015: 13). The quantitative data do in fact reveal correlations based on a certain number of trends and characteristic behaviours of young street people. Based on this approach, a general study by the Parliament of Canada in 2009 identified certain factors that, when combined, increase the "risk" of becoming homeless: general poverty, unsecure employment, family violence, mental health problems, drug use, poor academic performance, childhood involvement in social aid, or behavioural problems (Echenberg and Jensen, 2009). From this perspective, young people are not perceived as anonymous actors, capable of making choices and deliberately participating in prevention strategies. It is primarily qualitative research that has highlighted the importance of knowing the image young people have of the street, work, family and their own position on the fringe of society (Colombo, 2008, 2015; Parazelli, 2002; Bellot, 2001).

Prevention requires not only mechanical intervention on "risk factors" based on the distinction of observable triggers, but also consideration of the fact that these same factors (poverty, mental health, addiction, academic failure, joblessness, etc.) are most often shaped by discriminatory social representations of young street people.

The preventive approach also must adapt to the various realities experienced by young people who are already or at risk of being homeless. Certain social groups that are homeless suffer twofold discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or ethnic and cultural origins. As RAPSIM notes, [translation] “the prejudice attached to homelessness is reinforced and augmented by other sources of discrimination, especially related to physical appearance and sexual orientation” (RAPSIM, 2016: 8). In Montréal this applies to women, Aboriginal people, members of the LGBTQ community or immigrants.

These subcategories of homeless youth reveal a host of homeless lifestyles and reasons for becoming socially marginalized. Marginalized young people need personalized preventive measures tailored to their individual needs and specific life situation (ethnic group, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) as well as coaching to cope with the transitions inherent in youth (end of school, living independently, access to housing and entering the workplace).

Preventing youth homelessness first requires an approach capable of contributing to recognition of marginalized young people and challenging some of the discriminatory and victimizing social representations of these people. Parazelli’s work stresses that [translation] “analysis of the phenomenon of young street people [must strive] to move beyond simple description of coping strategies for a marginalized population and avoid reducing urban practices by young street people to a mathematical sum of risk factors” (Parazelli, 2002: 3). Prevention therefore requires not only a quantitative study of the problem, but also qualitative data, to understand how these young people see themselves, beyond the usual socialization authorities, to comprehend what leads them to “choose the street.” This understanding can guide innovative intervention and prevention practices that contribute to positive recognition of young people.

### *1.3 Devising preventive approaches within the City’s jurisdiction and competency: investigation methodology*

Through its jurisdiction over fields such as housing and local economic, community, cultural and social development, the City has tools that enable it to play a leading role in preventing youth homelessness. Unlike the provincial and federal governments, the municipal administration is characterized by proximity to its community. This reality foster implementation, promotion and funding of flexible, adapted and alternative approaches easily accessible for young people at risk of homelessness. At this level, prevention consists of defusing the latent or recurring tensions between marginalized young people and institutions.

Prevention of youth homelessness in Montréal must include the experience, observations and concerns of professional workers. We therefore conducted semi-directed documentary interviews with a dozen heads of groups and organizations that aid young people at risk of homelessness in Montréal. This qualitative initiative is less concerned *a priori* with a representative sample than with a rational selection of sources of information.

The following organizations and groups were consulted.

- Action jeunesse de l'Ouest-de-l'Île (AJOI)
- L'Anonyme
- La Maison Tangente (Auberge du cœur)
- Centre jeunesse de Montréal – Institut universitaire (rehabilitation services for teens and social reintegration service)
- Dans la rue – youth services branch
- Groupe Information Travail (Écolo-Boulot program)
- Le Refuge des Jeunes de Montréal
- PACT de rue
- Protecteur des personnes en situation d'homelessness (Serge Lareault)
- Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM)
- Community development adviser – responsible for homelessness issues (Pierre-Luc Lortie)
- Spectre de rue (TAPAJ program)

These interviews were intended to gain direct access to current problems experienced in intervention settings and round out some information missing from the grey or scientific literature. They therefore took a comprehensive approach, striving not to “demonstrate” or illustrate a thesis, but rather to foster understanding of the issues and problems specific to preventing youth homelessness in Montréal. They identified two key findings: the need for thorough knowledge of new realities of youth homelessness in Montréal and the need to promote flexible, accessible alternatives to homelessness for young people who want to distance themselves from the usual aid and support institutions.

## **2. Summary of Analytical Results**

### *2.1 Expand knowledge of the new realities of youth homelessness in Montréal*

The realities of youth homelessness in Montréal are no longer what they were in the 1990s. This finding is based on the practical experience of intervention workers seeking to understand and adapt to these new realities. However, several reference studies on homelessness and young street people in Montréal date from the late 1990s and focus on the downtown area (Parazelli, 1997, 2002; Fournier and Chevalier, 2001a, 2001b).

Today, aid organizations working downtown find that young people are occupying ever less public space and gather less in groups than in the 1990s. Repressive interventions in urban management of marginality apparently have helped dismantle these groups of young people in the downtown area (Colombo and Larouche, 2007). It is also note that young people at risk of homelessness appear to be increasingly alone. There has been an increase and intensification of mental health problems. Youth homelessness is no longer restricted to downtown, but occurs in a different and growing way in outlying districts and neighbourhoods. New cultural communities have appeared among young people using aid resources and are forging new group dynamics.

The first guiding principle of the *Plan d'action montréalais en itinérance 2014-2017* is “knowledge sharing,” designed to document the homelessness situation in Montréal. This effort to build knowledge, led in part by the census (Latimer, 2016), cannot preclude a qualitative approach that explores in depth the specifics and multiple aspects of youth homelessness today in Montréal.

On this point, note the inspiring example of the *Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations* (CSEYHP) project. This research conducted from 2009 to 2011 in the Czech Republic, Netherlands, Portugal and United Kingdom,<sup>5</sup> sought a better understanding of the situation of homeless youth, to work with determination on prevention and intervention measures. The study of policies to battle youth homelessness in these four countries was accompanied by a phase of interviews with 54 young street people. One particularity of this research, however, was integrating into the research process previously homeless young people as “associate peer-researchers.” These young people were recruited and trained to gather life stories. The results of this initiative have been deemed very useful for all parties involved (Meinema, 2010; CSEYHP, 2010). Beyond the censuses conducted by the City of Montréal, inspiration can be drawn from the CSEYHP’s European experience and innovation can be shown in the area of preventing youth homelessness. In Montréal, the Groupe d’intervention alternative par les pairs (GIAP) is already developing an intervention approach based on the similar experience of helping peers and young people. This expertise could be used by Montréal in a research project modelled on CSEYHP.

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<sup>5</sup> The research results are available at <https://www.movisie.com/combating-youth-homelessness>.

## *2.2 Recommendations for enhancing knowledge of youth homelessness*

### **Recommendation 1**

That the City of Montréal forge a partnership and consultation process with the academic world to integrate existing expertise on youth homelessness and promote research projects on recent changes in youth homelessness in Montréal.

### **Recommendation 2**

That the City of Montréal develop, in conjunction with aid organizations and the academic world, research opportunities promoting the integration of former young street people into the research process and contribute to their training as research assistants.

### **Recommendation 3**

That the City of Montréal develop closer cooperation with aid organizations and intervention workers when conducting censuses or studies of homelessness.

## *2.3 The City and proximity governance: correcting institutionally cumbersome approaches*

Marginalized by their original life circles, young people at risk of homelessness often have added a difficult institutional experience in which various constraints have made street life one of several options. Colombo defined three forms of parental relationships that mark the childhood of marginal people: rejection, abandonment and inconsistency (Colombo, 2015). Rejected children learn at an early age that they cannot rely on adults, while abandoned children are more inclined to fall into relationships of dependency, and children who have coped with parental inconsistency are driven by an acute sense of freedom and a desire to live without constraints. These various paths share a mistrust of the usual socialization and aid institutions. Social work literature on developing citizen practices with young street people reveals the **importance of recognizing this institutional overload and cautions against an institutionally heavy approach** (Parazelli and Colombo, 2006).

The researchers advocate making young people at risk of homelessness collective players capable of facing reality not from the perspective of “victims” needing “assistance,” but actors capable of independently investing the power they hold over their own acts and their immediate environment. This democratic approach to “social insertion” of young people at risk of homelessness can be aligned with the City’s jurisdictions and the proximity characteristic of municipal governance. The goal is to maintain bridges between the margin and the centre rather than eliminate the margin.

Based on the interviews and documentary research we conducted, we note three areas of activity in Montréal that can be supported and promoted with a view to preventing youth homelessness: i) **enhanced value of** and support for street work; ii) development of social and occupational opportunities that are **flexible and have few constraints**; iii) promotion of access programs for housing **adapted to the realities of young people** in transition to adult life. These areas of activity are not sufficient in themselves, must serve as a launchpad for positive recognition of the independence, words, choices and identify of marginalized young people. The following section examines the relevance of these areas of activity in a prevention initiative consistent with the City's jurisdictions.

### *2.3.1 Building the first bonds of trust: valuing and supporting street work*

Young people at risk of homelessness may find their access to aid resources compromised by the distances separating their lifestyle and the often rigid operation of formal institutions (Colombo and Parazelli, 2002; Cheval, 2000; Renaud, 1997; Fortier and Roy, 1996; Mendel, 1994). Street work is useful in this context as a **community strategy for building bonds of trust** with groups that avoid or are excluded from institutional spaces. The “bridging” position of street work is vital to preventing youth homelessness: while close enough to marginalized populations to build interpersonal bonds, street workers also have sufficient links to the community and network of resources to facilitate certain reconciliations.

This work provides wonderful opportunities for mediation between the marginal and institutional cultural worlds, needed to prevent youth homelessness. As Colombo notes, [translation] “[...] for many survey participants, the presence of these organizations and especially of street workers, professionals willing to listen, and places where they can feel that the meaning they assigned to their life in the street and their practices was recognized, and where they can build a meaningful link with adults contributed greatly to avoiding isolation in the street” (Colombo, 2016: 11).

In Montréal, some innovative projects to prevent youth homelessness are based on promoting sports and recreation. One example is the Action jeunesse de l'Ouest-de-l'Île (AJOI) initiative that has been running **AGSport** since 2011. By promoting access with sports venues for young people, this project provides a means for establishing and maintaining contacts with young people in the West Island area, to provide a continuum of psychosocial intervention.

In addition, the **Ali et les Princes de la rue** organization founded in 2001 uses the martial arts as a way to promote social integration of young people (14 to 25 years old) living primarily in the

Saint-Léonard, de Villeraŷ–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension, Montréal-Nord and Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve areas. In 2014, an assessment report of this program stressed that [translation] “[...] this organization’s mission is necessary and its existence is relevant to facilitate the social integration of many young people in the community” (Tichit *et al.*, 2014: 91). Supported by the City of Montréal and the Ministère de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS) du Québec, the organization maintains close links with young people referred to it by youth centres and also receives financial support from the Fondation du centre jeunesse de Montréal. The organization provides an example of direct cooperation by the City in the transition and social integration of young people preparing to leave Montréal’s youth centres. The Latimer (2016) study stressed that one third of homeless people age 30 or under in Montréal had previously lived at least six months in a youth centre.

### *2.3.2 Recommendations on street work*

#### **Recommendation 4**

That the City of Montréal value and advocate street work as a core component of a strategy to prevent youth homelessness.

#### **Recommendation 5**

That the City of Montréal ensure sufficient recurring funding for street work to promote its expansion as well as improved working conditions and retention rates for street workers.

### *2.3.3 Flexible social and occupational integration projects for young people*

The labour market forms part of the exclusion processes affecting marginalized young people. Lack of a job constitutes a vulnerability factor in terms of income as well as social inclusion. One of the major obstacles to reintegrating these young people is the gap between their lifestyle and the requirements of traditional work or integration channels. Social and occupational integration programs thus must be flexible enough to form part of a process linking the margin with obtaining more stable and conventional jobs. Promoting access to an income, but especially to work that can integrate marginalized young people into a social network and develop a positive relationship with oneself and one’s environment, is a key factor in the process of preventing youth homelessness. Social and occupational integration experiences must be able to link the economic and social aspects of work to help build a feeling of citizenship in young people at risk of homelessness.

In Montréal, the Travail alternatif payé à la journée (TAPAJ – alternative work paid by the day) program introduced in 2000 by the Spectre de rue organization has been a major success in promoting flexible social and occupational integration methods for youth. Since 2014, the Government of France has used the success of TAPAJ Bordeaux in France as a model to launch a national project to extend TAPAJ across the country. The City of Montréal in turn can draw inspiration from France's experience. The development of shared tools to promote the improvement and portability of the TAPAJ program beyond Montréal and Québec may provide the opportunity for the City of Montréal to assume its leadership in preventing youth homelessness and working in conjunction with the provincial government.

#### *2.3.4 Recommendations on social and occupational integration*

##### **Recommendation 6**

That the City of Montréal continue funding the TAPAJ program and institute actions with various government authorities for financial assistance programs supporting the battle against homelessness to promote the expansion of TAPAJ-type activities.

#### *2.3.5 The right to housing and sharing of space: housing adapted to the young people's reality*

For 90 percent of homeless people in Canada, poverty and shortage of affordable housing are the main factors leading to homelessness (Gaetz *et al.*, 2014a: 41). Based on a detailed report by Gaetz (2014b) for the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, *Homeless Hub*, the “housing first” approach is proving very successful in Canada, the United States and Europe, but is still poorly adapted to the needs of homeless youth or those at risk of homelessness (13 to 25 years old).

**Housing First** is not a program but rather a comprehensive approach based on the rights and philosophy that everyone deserves a home and that adequate housing is a condition for restoring social bonds and an independent lifestyle. The Housing First program grants priority to chronic homeless people with serious mental illness and adjustment problems. A response to youth homelessness in the Housing First context means approaches focused on the specific needs of young people in transition to adult life. These approaches must be able to prepare young people not only to access independent housing but also to return home if this is the desired option.

Launched in 2015 by the Homeward Trust Edmonton organization, the Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton seeks to adapt the Housing First approach to the reality of young people in Edmonton (Homeward Trust, 2015). Homeward Trust conducted consultations

with young people at risk or who had been homeless, to define the difficulties in accessing housing (Puligandla *et al.*, 2016). Young people were invited to talk about obstacles to housing, education and access to health care as well as ways to end youth homelessness. In addition to promoting better knowledge of the reality of young people at risk of homelessness, this type of initiative can take many forms, contributing to positive recognition of young people, their choices and their representations of the spaces they occupy or wish to occupy.

Moreover, from 2009 to 2013, the Housing First approach has been placed at the centre of the strategy to battle homelessness in the city of Odense, Denmark. The third largest city in Denmark, Odense saw homelessness decline by 47 percent during these four years while it rose 6 percent in Copenhagen and 16 percent in Denmark as a whole. Strategic housing consultant Tom Ronning attributes this success to a preventive approach that places the accent on developing an inclusive community focused on **understanding** the situations experienced by people at risk of homelessness as well as the institution of mechanisms for dialogue (Ronning, 2013). The experience of Odense shows potential for involvement by the municipality, residents and various players in the battle against homelessness to develop an inclusive city. One important factor is the central role played by the municipality of Odense in developing a general understanding of the realities of homelessness.

### *2.3.6 Recommendations on housing*

#### **Recommendation 7**

That the City of Montréal conduct representations with the governments involved to increase the availability of housing alternatives inspired by a Housing First approach and coaching adapted to the reality of young people, especially as part of the federal partnership strategy to battle homelessness.

#### **Recommendation 8**

That the City of Montréal promote the availability of residential alternatives combined with mechanisms for consultation, concertation and dialogue between young people and residents, merchants and community players in the neighbourhood where they live.

### 3. General Recommendations

#### Recommendation 9

That the City of Montréal pay special attention to the issue of **hidden homelessness** of young people in its efforts to battle and prevent homelessness, especially in its homelessness action plan that will replace the current 2014-2017 plan.

#### Recommendation 10

That the City of Montréal, in its efforts to document the homelessness situation, promote the production of **qualitative** data and analyses on the specific problem of youth homelessness in Montréal, by using gender-based analysis (GBA+).

#### Recommendation 11

That the City of Montréal rely on qualitative data and analyses to adapt the preventive approach to the special needs of **young women, Aboriginal people, immigrants and members of the LGBTQ community** at risk of homelessness.

#### Recommendation 12

That the City of Montréal, through the proximity characteristic of municipal governance, encourage prevention initiatives based on street work, social and occupational integration, and housing, with a **flexible and accessible** approach to reach as many young people as possible.

#### Recommendation 13

That the City of Montréal project its leadership in the battle against youth homelessness by promoting **an innovative concept of prevention** in which young people are not portrayed as victims requiring assistance, independent actors with power over their own acts and their environment. This stance reinforces young people's role as citizens and encourages the building of bridges between the centre and the margin, instead of eliminating the latter.

### 4. Summary of Recommendations

#### Recommendations to improve knowledge of youth homelessness

##### Recommendation 1

That the City of Montréal forge a partnership and consultation process with the academic world to integrate existing expertise on youth homelessness and promote research projects on recent changes in youth homelessness in Montréal.

**Recommendation 2**

That the City of Montréal develop, in conjunction with aid organizations and the academic world, research opportunities promoting the integration of former young street people into the research process and contribute to their training as research assistants.

**Recommendation 3**

That the City of Montréal develop closer cooperation with aid organizations and intervention workers when conducting censuses or studies of homelessness.

**Recommendations on street work**

**Recommendation 4**

That the City of Montréal value and advocate street work as a core component of a strategy to prevent youth homelessness.

**Recommendation 5**

That the City of Montréal ensure sufficient recurring funding for street work to promote its expansion as well as improved working conditions and retention rates for street workers.

**Recommendations on social and occupational integration**

**Recommendation 6**

That the City of Montréal continue funding the TAPAJ program and institute actions with various government authorities for financial assistance programs supporting the battle against homelessness to promote the expansion of TAPAJ-type activities.

**Recommendations on housing**

**Recommendation 7**

That the City of Montréal conduct representations with the governments involved to increase the availability of housing alternatives inspired by a Housing First approach and coaching adapted to the reality of young people, especially as part of the federal partnership strategy to battle homelessness.

### **Recommendation 8**

That the City of Montréal promote the availability of residential alternatives combined with mechanisms for consultation, concertation and dialogue between young people and residents, merchants and community players in the neighbourhood where they live.

### **General recommendations**

### **Recommendation 9**

That the City of Montréal pay special attention to the issue of **hidden homelessness** of young people in its efforts to battle and prevent homelessness, especially in its homelessness action plan that will replace the current 2014-2017 plan.

### **Recommendation 10**

That the City of Montréal, in its efforts to document the homelessness situation, promote the production of **qualitative** data and analyses on the specific problem of youth homelessness in Montréal, by using gender-based analysis (GBA+).

### **Recommendation 11**

That the City of Montréal rely on qualitative data and analyses to adapt the preventive approach to the special needs of **young women, Aboriginal people, immigrants and members of the LGBTQ community** at risk of homelessness.

### **Recommendation 12**

That the City of Montréal, through the proximity characteristic of municipal governance, encourage prevention initiatives based on street work, social and occupational integration, and housing, with a **flexible and accessible** approach to reach as many young people as possible.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the City of Montréal project its leadership in the battle against youth homelessness by promoting **an innovative concept of prevention** in which young people are not portrayed as victims requiring assistance, independent actors with power over their own acts and their environment. This stance reinforces young people's role as citizens and encourages the building of bridges between the centre and the margin, instead of eliminating the latter.

## **Conclusion**

While prevention can help some young people avoid becoming homeless, it cannot totally spare a society from the experience of youth homelessness. It is impossible to eliminate youth homelessness, not because of the limited capacity of the City or intervention organizations, but rather because prevention must recognize that the street and the fringe may always represent a necessary “forced choice” for some young people. An effective prevention strategy cannot set the goal of eliminating homelessness or the margin, nor can it deny the importance of the paradox that cuts through most policies to battle homelessness: taking charge of reintegrating homeless individuals into a society that actually contributed to marginalizing them. The preventive posture is that of an ability to address the complex phenomenon of homelessness by exposing images of victimization or social reprobation. These images run through society’s discourse on the existence of marginalized young people and obstruct their independence and positive recognition.

Despite this complex and constantly changing theoretical problem, this summary focuses on the practical preventive practices that can be used effectively in the City of Montréal’s areas of jurisdiction. The alternatives to homelessness presented not only proceed from documentary research and a survey of the literature on preventing youth homelessness, but are also rooted in a process of interviews with officials of aid and intervention organizations within the City of Montréal. The resulting recommendations are essential to a preventive approach specific to the proximity that the municipal government can maintain with its citizens, which can factor in the social aspirations of young people in difficulty.

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