A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness

National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness
Communauté nationale d'apprentissage sur l'inébranlable des jeunes

Neighbours Alive!

BNRC

A WAY HOME
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI
At any given time, when we are waiting (sometimes years) for housing, we are scared for our families because we are only one step away from being homeless.
The Brandon Neighborhood Renewal Corporation facilitated this project in Brandon, Manitoba by inviting many local stakeholders to the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee, garnering a diverse group of representatives from a wide-range of local agencies.

**Founding Steering Committee**

**Brandon Neighborhood Renewal Corporation (BNRC)**  
Carly Gasparini and Marty Snelling, General Managers  
Naomi Leadbeater, Community Development Coordinator  
Susan Spring, Brandon Homelessness Partnering Strategy Coordinator

**Brandon Friendship Centre**  
– Gail Cullen, Executive Director (co-chair)

**Westman Youth for Christ**  
– Dwayne Dyck, Executive Director (co-chair)

**Brandon Correctional Centre**  
– Jodi Chubaty, Assistant Superintendent of Programs

**Brandon School Division**  
– Greg Malazdrewicz, Associate Superintendent

**Brandon Police Services**  
– Constable Grant McKay

**Brandon University**  
– Dr. Renee Robinson, Associate Professor

**Brandon Urban Aboriginal People’s Council**  
– Jason Gobeil, Aboriginal Community Coordinator

**Career and Employments Youth Services**  
– Shirley Hammond, Project Coordinator

**Child and Family Services**  
– Breanna Dick

**At Risk Youth Program**  
– David Long

**City of Brandon**  
– Richard Greer, Community Development Coordinator

**A Way Home**  
– Mary Jane McKitterick, Community Planning Manager

**LaBuick & Co.**  
– Tanya LaBuick, Senior Principal

**Neelin High School Off-Campus**  
– Pat Vera

**On the Side Graphics**  
– Tyler Stephens, Senior Designer/Founder

Please note that A Place to Call Home’s Steering Committee has since grown to over 30 members from 25 different organizations in Brandon, Manitoba. This group continues to work together on the implementation and evaluation of recommendations of this document.

**Community Researchers**

Ms. Michelle Lemoine, BA, BEd, MRD (Cand.)  
Mark Anderson, Private Consultant  
Naomi Leadbeater, Community Development Coordinator, BNRC
These are the three colours and images that represents my home. The traffic lights symbolizes our communication and realizing our dreams in anything that we all do. We just have to give it a go if it’s beneficial to everyone. To slow down if the going gets tough and to stop when necessary. Always remember that tomorrow is another day and always feel loved. The last image shows how simple our life back home.
Executive Summary

Youth Homelessness is a growing problem in Brandon and the surrounding area. The first Point in Time count revealed that almost one-half of people who were homeless in Brandon were also under the age of 30. This plan was developed with directed outcomes and objectives that will make a measurable difference in preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness in Brandon. Accompanying this plan is a Strategic Framework that serves as a road map for implementing the recommendations of A Place to Call Home’s Steering Committee.

A Place to Call Home: Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness sets out clear goals to ending youth homelessness in Brandon, and focusses on issues of rural migration to urban centres. Youth homelessness has both human and financial costs, and in this respect, Brandon is no different from other communities. In Brandon however, strains on housing, low vacancy rates in rental housing and strains on the emergency system require solutions to address systems as a whole, and not only frontline responses. Additionally, while much work has been done to broaden the public view of homeless individuals, much work still remains to engage the public understanding of homelessness as broader than street homelessness.

The origins of A Place to Call Home began with Brandon being selected as a pilot community for the national Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness (MLC) Program. All of the artwork within this report was created by individuals who took part in the community art project led by Chris Cooper “A Place to Call Home” and Tyler Stephens, our graphic designer. The development of this plan has received support from MLC program partners including: A Way Home Coalition partners as well as the early support from local stakeholders such as the Brandon Friendship Centre, Youth for Christ, Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba, Brandon School Division, Brandon Police Services, and Brandon Correctional Institution. A full list of current committee members can be found in the appendices of this document.

Without the above organizations, and many other individuals, including youth who told their story, this document would not be possible.
Strategic Framework

Please see A Place To Call Home Strategic Framework document for expanded strategies, goals and recommended local actions.

Prevention
Goal: Prevent youth from becoming homeless

Housing and Supports
Goal: Youth have access to a continuum of affordable housing to meet their needs, with a range of support options that enable youth to successfully transition to adulthood.

Integrated System of Care
Goal: Youth will have access to an integrated system of care and be able to access the same resources regardless of where they touch systems.
OR
Youth will receive the same supports and services, assessment, and level of care, regardless of where they enter the system.

Integrated System Planning
Goal: Youth systems will be integrated locally, provincially and nationally to provide services to youth in a timely fashion with adequate resources.
Implementation and Evaluation Plan

**Collaborate**

- Hire a plan implementation manager and/or a project coordinator(s) supported by A Place to Call Home Steering Committee to work with community groups, strategic partners and funders to ensure implementation of the plan.
- Participate in provincial planning processes to end youth homelessness in the Province of Manitoba.
- Establish a youth-led group and hire youth leaders as necessary, that will work with the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee to ensure that the voices of youth with lived experience impact policy and program design and decisions.

**Plan and Execute**

- Monitor measurable outcomes and benchmarks for Year 1, 2 & 3 of plan implementation. This may include cost benefit measures, and measure to determine the effectiveness of implemented action items.
- Development of consistent data collection and sharing methodologies.
- Develop evaluation methods to monitor effectiveness of programs and services, and to guide prevention and support based programming.
- Ensure that local plans integrate with other multi-jurisdictional homelessness and poverty reduction planning processes.
- Solidify strategic funding partnerships locally, provincially and nationally for the implementation of A Place Called Home.

**Measure and Evaluate**

- Share outcomes and benchmarks for Year 1, 2 & 3 goals and priorities of A Place to Call Home: Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness.
- Collect consistent data with sharing methodologies.
- Monitor effectiveness of programs and services, and use results to guide prevention and support based programming.
- Assess current services and resources to uncover existing gaps and identify further opportunities that will prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.
- Continue collaboration with national partners on the National Youth Homelessness Prevalence Survey and further research regarding youth homelessness.
Key Considerations

The purpose of A Place to Call Home: Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness is two-fold. Primarily, this document advocates for a targeted response to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness in Brandon, Manitoba. Secondarily, this document will be an effective public awareness tool to bring the issue of at-risk and vulnerable youth, especially those who experience homelessness, to light in safe and inclusive spaces. A Place to Call Home makes recommendations that the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee developed through research with focus groups, key informant interviews, a Point in Time count, as well as a gap analysis of services currently offered to youth. As the recommendations are implemented, they will be measured and evaluated to determine impacts and successes of new programming resulting in a measurable reduction in youth homelessness in our city.

The City of Brandon is not immune to problems larger cities face, and it has its own unique factors given its regional setting as a geographic hub for Southwestern Manitoba. The challenges we face in alleviating youth homelessness as a city have a provincial scope, and policies at the municipal, provincial and federal levels have an important role to play moving forward to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.

The development and implementation of this plan is guided and driven by several key considerations:

- Shifting focus to efforts on preventing and ending youth homelessness, rather than relying on emergency responses alone.
- Developing solutions that provide culturally appropriate supports for youth, including diverse populations such as LGBT2QS, newly immigrated youth, young offenders, youth affected by domestic or sexual violence, and pregnant and parenting youth.
- Using a lens of decolonization and culturally appropriate responses that are led by Indigenous communities.
- Using a Family First approach recognizes that family is important to almost everyone and supporting families to reconcile damaged relationships can help young people experiencing homelessness move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way.
- Providing youth appropriate response strategies for youth in crisis.
- Aligning with existing and future plans at the local, regional and provincial levels, such as Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Plans, End Homelessness Winnipeg, and All Aboard Poverty Reduction Strategy in Manitoba.
- Giving youth opportunities to articulate their needs in safe and respectful ways.
- Supporting youth to transition to adulthood in healthy and safe ways.
- Implementing prevention strategies with involvement and partnerships at all levels of government, community organizations, and the private sector.
- Allocating financial resources to new and existing programs that have measurable results.
Community Priorities

This plan’s focus on moving from managing to preventing and ending youth homelessness in Brandon begins with targeted prevention strategies which will ultimately alleviate strain on the emergency systems which are currently a bottleneck.

STRATEGIES FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS

*Can we move from this...*

At all times, this plan aims to have the voices of young people prominent in decision making and all aspects of planning and implementation. During the planning portion of this project, youth were consulted through focus groups and interviews, and through information passed by service organizations on the Steering Committee. During implementation, the A Place To Call Home Steering Committee commits to including youth in decision making and design. This may include youth members on the Steering Committee, consultations, as employees, or as public awareness champions.

The strategic framework identifies where systems need to change, and what lenses the Steering Committee applies to its decision making process. These lenses include:

- A ‘No Wrong Door’ approach using a system of care.
- Wrap-around supports that account for individual and unique needs of youth.
- Equitable treatment for all youth regardless of background, ethnicity, culture, gender and sexual orientation.
- Youth are in control and make decisions about their own lives with guidance and supports.
Core Principles

The core principles that guide the Steering Committee began with a desire for youth engagement, positive youth development and youth voice in the plan. The Steering Committee also defined priority populations and issues including migration of youth to Brandon, young men at high risk of entering the justice system, Indigenous people, those who identify as LGBT2QS, and youth who experience sexual and domestic violence as groups that may need specialized responses.

One core principle adopted by the Steering Committee is to advocate for a Housing First Framework for Youth. The following outlines the philosophy behind Housing First For Youth.

1. Immediate access to housing with no preconditions, including harm reduction principles.

2. Youth choice and self determination

3. Positive youth development orientation

4. Individualized and client-driven supports

5. Social and community integration

For some youth, permanent housing may not be a safe or reasonable first step. Housing First for Youth allows for a staged approach that transitions with youth through appropriate housing and supports needed, and with the goal of healthy transitions to adulthood. Other core principles for dealing with youth at risk or experiencing homelessness adopted by the committee are using a ‘No Wrong Door’ approach, and integrating system planning to ensure that youth are supported from the time they touch a system support until their lives are stabilized.
Defining Youth Homelessness

According to The State of Homelessness in Canada report published in 2013, there are 30,000 homeless Canadians on any given night, and 200,000 people experience homelessness per year. Because of the precarious and dangerous lifestyle that is associated with homelessness, people experiencing homelessness in Canada access “costly and uncoordinated emergency services” more frequently, and are “cycle[d] through expensive public systems” (Gaetz, et. al., 2013) costing the Canadian economy an estimated $7.05 billion annually.

When we focus on youth homelessness, we are better able to prevent the costly cycle’s associated with emergency services, corrections and other public systems. By turning our attention from managing homelessness to focusing on youth, we are better able to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness through building resiliency, reuniting families, and connecting youth to the services they need before entering into homelessness.

Youth who experience homelessness often move in and out of housing and support systems numerous times. Unlike adults who enter into homelessness, youth are more susceptible and vulnerable to breakdowns in systems such as poor release planning from care facilities such as group homes, hospitals, and the justice system or difficult transitions out of foster care. Many youth experience more difficulty finding affordable housing because of an inability to sign leases or a lack of references. They may also have inadequate income which can lead to living in a more vulnerable situation with other youth and adults, or inadequate and under maintained housing. When we add to this, factors such as family breakdown, job loss, mental health or addictions, we get a perfect storm that sees a vulnerable youth move from home to couch surfing, to sleeping rough or staying in shelters repeatedly.

As illustrated above, the conditions by which youth become homelessness are different than those of adults. Therefore it is useful to have a supplemental definition for youth homelessness. The Canadian definition of youth homelessness developed by The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness is:

“The situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but have no stable or consistent residence and currently lack the means and ability to acquire it. Young people who become homelessness are typically in the process of transitioning towards adulthood (cognitively, socially, emotionally) and may not have acquired the personal, social and life skills, experiences, education and resources to become fully independent and sustain themselves over the long term.” (Gaetz, et. al., 2013)
Youth Homelessness in Canada/Manitoba

According to The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, young people ages 16 - 24 make up approximately 20% of the homeless population. Gaetz et al., 2013 states that: “The Homelessness Partnership Strategy (HPS) has regularly used the estimate that between 150,000 and 300,000 individuals experience homelessness in Canada in a given year.” Respectively, in any given year, 30,000 to 60,000 youth experience homelessness. In Manitoba, various government programs may consider a person as a youth up to the age of 30. Brandon has chosen to use the age range 16 - 30 to define youth for this reason.

Manitoba’s population has a higher percentage of Indigenous people than most other provinces, and according to The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014, Indigenous populations are tremendously over represented in current homeless populations and at-risk of experiencing homelessness populations. “Poverty, lack of opportunity, discrimination and an inadequate and declining housing supply mean that many Aboriginal people continue to fall into homelessness.” (Gaetz et al 2014 p 10) When we take into consideration the effects of colonization, residential schools and the high number of Indigenous youth in foster care, it is clear that any solutions, whether prevention, housing, supports, or system changes, must be done with collaboration and active participation of Indigenous populations and government. The recent release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Final Report as well as the addition of housing as a basic human right to the United Nations Charter of Human Rights offer both justification and means to bring all levels of government and people together to address the issue of youth homelessness.

There is an emerging community of practice and collective effort to address the issue of youth homelessness on a provincial and national scale rather than city by city. This community of practice has developed based on the participation of community advocates in the National Learning Community and A Way Home Coalition, and better communication between small cities, service regions and larger urban centres.

Manitoba has recently completed Point in Time Counts in three major cities. Brandon, did an initial count in January, 2015, followed by Thompson in March, 2015 and Winnipeg in October, 2015. Point in Time Counts are generally conducted over 12 - 24 hours and offer a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given day. Key informant interviews conducted in Brandon in 2015 with service providers, indicated that many youth are not originally from Brandon and have migrated to multiple Manitoba communities. The reasons for moving include accessing resources such as affordable housing and jobs, fleeing domestic violence, and accessing health services not available in their home communities.
Youth Homelessness in Brandon

As a result of consulting with the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee, Brandon conducted a Point in Time Count, met with youth focus groups, and held key informant interviews with youth service providers. Brandon University and the Place to Call Home Steering Committee partnered to ensure research and ethics standards were maintained during youth consultations and research. Additionally, Prairie Mountain Health recently published a community health assessment which captures data around youth usage of emergency, mental health and community health services.

The Point in Time Count conducted January 21st, 2015 resulted in connections with 117 homeless individuals during a twenty-four hour period in Brandon. Almost half (47%) of these individuals were under the age of 30, and 35% of all respondents indicated they had been homeless for more than a year. One third of all respondents were female and 20% of those female respondents had children under the age of 5 with them on the day of the count.

Focus groups conducted with approximately 40 different individuals showed that common barriers youth experience when trying to access housing are; lack of affordable youth focused or other housing, low income, and lack of financial management skills to successfully maintain housing. Youth and key informant interviews with youth service providers were asked the following question:

“What do you believe our community needs in order to prevent and end youth homelessness?”

Three of the common themes from youth included:

- Someone to help me look for housing
- Someone that will advocate me
- A place like 7th Street Health Access centre that is more accessible for youth

Some of the common themes from service providers included:

- A place that is specific for youth that will advocate for them, provide access to resources and offer programming and services all in the same spot
- More youth specific affordable housing
- A permanent youth housing coordinator
- Transitional supportive housing units geared to the specific needs of youth
- More public awareness and education around housing and homelessness in schools
- A resource centre that is easy to access, and is not a store front or inside a provincial building
Emerging research reveals mental illness to be both a cause and result of youth homelessness. 10 to 20% of young people experience serious mental health issues in Canada but the situation for homeless youth can range between 40 – 70%. (Coming of Age, Gaetz, 2014). There are reported increased rates of youth suffering severe mental illness who become homeless after the onset of their mental illness. Additionally those who were released from psychiatric treatment can became homeless following discharge from services. (Kidd, S.A. 2013).

Given the link between mental health and youth homelessness, recent findings from the Prairie Mountain Health Community Health Assessment are of concern as they reveal increased numbers of young people accessing treatment who are experiencing mental health crisis. The Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) is a 10 bed unit that provides 24 hour care to youth in mental health crisis. Treatment focuses on alleviating the crisis, assessing underlying contributing factors, and developing an individualized treatment plan that can be successfully transitioned to the community upon discharge. Due to backlogs, and waiting times, many youths first receive treatment after a crisis, or traumatic event, rather than receiving treatments proactively. In 2014, the CSU saw more youth than any year before, including the period prior to the transition from an inpatient unit. The highest number of annual admissions as an inpatient unit was 128. There was also a 5% increase in the proportion of admissions of youth from the North Zone (20%). This increase could be related to greater awareness of the service since amalgamation, staffing challenges in the North Zone, or improved access through broader admission criteria. There has also been an increase in admissions of youth from outside the Prairie Mountain Health region due to a review of referral processes and redistribution of appropriate referrals within the province. Over half of admissions were for Brandon youth, and the majority (65%) of youth identified as female. Other resources such as the Child and Adolescent Treatment Centre are experiencing an increase in the use of services, and seeing more youth from outside the city being admitted.

Note: Respondents could pick more than one answer (so it doesn’t add up to 100%). Total Sample Size 200
Homeless Serving Organizations in Brandon

The homeless serving system in Brandon is a close knit and collaborative effort of service providers and non-profit entities in Brandon. Most of these services exist in Brandon’s downtown core, and there are numerous programs for youth, vulnerable youth and youth at risk of homelessness in Brandon. A comprehensive list of service providers in Brandon can be found on the Brandon Homelessness website in the resource section. The list below offers a glimpse of youth services offered by those on the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee with a brief description of the services they offer and any housing stock they may coordinate. A copy of the latest resource guide can be accessed here: http://brandon-homelessness.weebly.com/resource-guide.html
Housing

There are a number of organizations that coordinate housing and/or shelters for youth working together on the Place to Call Home Steering Committee. They include: Youth for Christ Westman, The Brandon Friendship Centre, Samaritan House, Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba, Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services and the YWCA of Brandon.

Youth for Christ supports youth between the ages of 17 and 29 through transitional housing, pocket suites and programming. At present, they coordinate 21 beds, 18 of which are independent and 3 of which are semi-independent living suites. Youth for Christ employs an Aboriginal Housing First Youth Coordinator that works in partnership with Brandon Housing First, The Safe and Warm Shelter, and is a team member for their Uturn housing and programs. This position engages with unsheltered youth and provides connections to housing first services, personalized care plans and service provision.

The Crisis Pregnancy Centre manages three units of transitional housing. This housing and supports program helps single pregnant and parenting young women by providing transitional housing and support while pregnant. Those in the program are eligible to stay for up to one year after the birth of a child with the goal of finding stable permanent housing within that time frame.

The Brandon Friendship Centre offers support through housing and programming which includes a youth centre. A high proportion of their clients are under the age of 30. At present, the Brandon Friendship Centre manages rent-geared-to-income housing: 42 housing units, 14 suites at Massey Manor and, 8 transitional units at Project Hope. The Friendship Centre Youth Program sees an average of 30 youth per day, and its programs for new parents support 150 families per year with most of the participants under 30. Supportive services are offered through a cultural worker, community mental health workers, adult education, and employment preparation.

Samaritan House Ministries Brandon coordinates the only seasonal dorm style emergency shelter in Brandon during the winter months. This shelter is open to all members of the public experiencing homelessness, has 10 beds and is open seasonally from November - March. No data is available on the cohort of individuals under 30, but information will be available in the future once HIFIS agreements are in place with Brandon Housing First. Samaritan House also coordinates Mary’s house which has 4 transitional units that can be access for a period of up to 9 months before transitioning to permanent housing. This housing is designated specifically for women and children who have experienced domestic violence, and are accessing a supportive service. Participation in services is required to maintain housing at Mary’s house. Mothers must be over 18 and children living in the units under the age of 21.
In addition to emergency and transitional housing, Samaritan House also manages and oversees the Brandon Food Bank which hands out over 1600 hampers per month. A hamper is available every two weeks to those in need, and over 50% of hamper recipients are under 30 with most having multiple children under the age of 18.

The Canadian Mental Health Association of Western Manitoba’s (CMHA) head office is based in Brandon, and provides mental health and housing workers to any member of the community experiencing mental health issues. At present, CMHA coordinates and maintains 10 self-contained emergency housing units. Each unit can be accessed for up to 60 days and CMHA works with individuals to transition them to either transitional or permanent housing before reaching the 60-day stay. At present, all units are full on an ongoing basis and over 200 people were turned away last year because of lack of space. CMHA collects some data on people staying in the emergency units, but age specific or demographic
Housing Continued

data is not available at this time. The implementation of HIFIS and a common assessment tool would capture how many individuals accessing the emergency units are under 30.
The YWCA of Brandon hosts a Violence Against Women (VAW) shelter and manages three Emergency Homelessness Units similar to the self-contained units managed by CMHA. The women’s shelter can accommodate up to 24 women and children and features a common dining room, large playroom for children, living room and laundry facilities. In addition to shelter, group counselling and follow up support as well as children’s programs are available. The YWCA offers a 24-hour crisis line for women and children. YWCA also maintains a transitional housing unit which is co-ed and has 21 individual bedrooms. Supervised care is offered to a wide variety of clients with support for mental health, addictions, employment and training. The transitional residence operates at 93% occupancy (90 women and men annually), while the Emergency Homelessness Units (155 individuals or 50 families annually) and the VAW Women’s shelter (200 women and 250 children annually) operate at approximately 70% occupancy. 50% of the clients using the transitional shelter are under the age of thirty, while youth occupancy of the VAW and Emergency Shelter would be in excess of 75%.

Brandon and area are served by three main Child and Family Services agencies including Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba, West Region Child and Family Services, Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services, Michif Child and Family Services and other child welfare agencies in our region. Manitoba has over 10,000 children in care with approximately 90% of those in care identifying as Indigenous. No specific data on how many children are in care in the city of Brandon could be obtained. This information should be tracked in the future, to determine if recommendations have the intended impact of connecting more families, and better exit planning from care. A recent change to how children in care are counted by the Province of Manitoba may allow for better tracking of children in care in the future.

Education

Many groups in Brandon offer educational programming including the Brandon School Division, Assiniboine Community College and the Brandon Friendship Centre. The Brandon School division has two programs that target at risk youth, Neelin High School Off-Campus and the At-Risk Youth Program.

Neelin High School Off-Campus opened in 2007 and has had over 500 graduates in the past 8 years. In addition to core subjects, Neelin Off-Campus provides additional life-skills opportunities for youth when funding allows. Youth identified in other high schools in Brandon who are struggling to conform to standardized education settings are streamlined into this program. At Neelin Off-Campus, youth can work at their own pace, and design a flexible schedule that works with their other responsibilities including work and parenting. This program also accepts students not currently registered in any high school as long as they are under the age of 21.

The At-Risk Youth Program diverts troubled students, including gang involved members, those with addictions issues, and high-risk youth from city high schools to alternative programming. The program targets students 16 - 18 years old with a focus on youth in custody or those who are already struggling in school and require more supports than the average student. Extra supports may include life-skills training, addictions and mental health counselling, among others.

Assiniboine Community College Adult Collegiate has a campus located in downtown Brandon that services any individual over the age of 18 to help them attain their educational goals. As part of Assiniboine Community College (ACC), many of the courses offered allow for advanced placement in diploma and certificate programs offered at ACC. This campus also coordinates English as a Second Language requirements for new immigrants to the Brandon area, and in most classes, students are under the age of 24.

The Brandon Friendship Centre offers a number of educational supports to its members as well. (Gi) Kinaa’amaadiliwamingoons “The Little Teaching Lodge”, is a preschool program that strives to strengthen and prepare Indigenous children with a balance of cultural knowledge and academic skills needed to excel in school and life. The Adult Upgrading program offers adults the chance to upgrade their skills (reading, writing, math, and computer skills) before applying to another institution such as the Adult Collegiate, or writing the General Education Diploma (GED). This program offers one-on-one instruction with a literacy instructor and students work with staff to create a personalized education plan.
Employment

Three employment and training programs and services are part of the A Place to Call Home steering committee. These include: Brandon Energy Efficiency Program (BEEP) managed by the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation (BNRC), Career and Employment Youth Centre (CEYS), and The Brandon Friendship Centre (BFC). BFC recently took over managing a casual job bank for CEYS.

The Brandon Energy Efficiency Program seeks to improve energy and water efficiency of existing homes and also builds energy and water efficient affordable housing in Brandon and surrounding communities.

The guidelines for being accepted into the BEEP program include:

- Being previously unemployed and/or on EI or EIA
- To be accepted into the apprenticeship program, trainees must complete their Grade 12 education

Annually this program supports 25 positions with employees working Monday to Thursday with Friday off to pursue further education or work other casual jobs. A majority of the participants in the BEEP program since its inception have been under the age of 24. The program also works with trainees to stabilize other areas of their lives including housing and support services such as mental health and addictions counselling.

The Career and Youth Employment Centre operates in downtown Brandon and assists youth between the ages of 15 and 30 who are not collecting Employment Insurance. They offer training for resume writing, cover letters, interview tips and connections to employers. CEYS also works with employers to match youth to jobs where they and employers they are more likely to succeed together. Recent funding has allowed CEYS to expand the pool of youth they may work with on specific projects.

The Brandon Community Garden Network, coordinated by Samaritan House Ministries is beginning a youth targeted social enterprise which will give opportunities to food bank clients to access a community garden and sell produce at market. Food bank clients under 30 and with children will be prioritized. In the upcoming year, the garden network will support 10 to 15 individuals through training, education, and employability skills.
A PLACE TO CALL HOME: Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness

Wrap Around Services

Three main wrap-around services exist in Brandon and are currently serving at risk and homeless youth in various capacities. Manitoba Metis Federation Southwest Region coordinates Brandon’s Housing First program. This program is new to Brandon and began in 2014. Brandon’s Housing first program is a wrap-around service which currently works to house chronic and episodically homeless individuals in our community. Both the Seventh Street Health Access Centre coordinated and funded by Prairie Mountain Health and Community Mobilization HUB coordinated by the City of Brandon Police Services connect youth to the services they need and in the latter case, attempt to work upstream and prevent youth from entering into homelessness. Seventh Street Health Access Centre serves the general public and youth over the age of 18. Those under the age of 18 may access care with a parent or guardian. This location employs a nurse practitioner, service navigator, community health nurse, a community mental health worker for those over 18, housing resource worker, addictions services, a social worker, cultural facilitators, consumer peer support facilitator and a community volunteer income tax program.

In addition to these staff, the facility has many other amenities available on a first come first served basis including:

- Showers
- Washer and dryer
- Community phone with messaging services available
- Computers with internet access for job searching
- Faxing and photocopying
- Meeting rooms

The other wrap around service currently in use in Brandon is the Community Mobilization HUB coordinated by Brandon Police Services with partnership from the Regional Health Authority, Brandon School Division, Addictions Foundation and many other non-profit groups in Brandon. This service started in April, 2015 and has helped guide 100 clients towards needed services before they reach a crisis point. Over 75% of clients have been under the age of 30 and only 5% of those contacted have refused service. This service is most accurately described as risk-driven collaborative intervention and based on the original program piloted in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The committee meets twice per week and each service provider brings to the table a case that meets imminent risk criteria to the table. After discussions, if criteria are met for an intervention, the group forms a team of service providers who then make contact with the individual or family to offer more and often better coordinated services. The introduction of this service to Brandon has resulted in individuals and families receiving services prior to an emergency situation and can be considered a homelessness prevention service.
Poverty in Brandon

In order to prevent youth homelessness, all aspects of poverty that may affect youth, and the effects of local, provincial and federal programming and mandates must be considered. The Province of Manitoba’s All Aboard Poverty Reduction Strategy: Creating Opportunities for Youth Strategy, focuses on seven areas of poverty reduction and alleviation.

- Sustainable Employment and a Stronger Labour Market
- Targeted Supports for Those Most in Need
- Food Security
- Creating Opportunities for Youth
- Closing the Gap for Aboriginal Manitobans
- Housing
- Starting Early, Starting Strong: Manitoba’s Five Year Plan for Early Childhood Development

All of these areas play a role in preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness. The report indicates areas where policy changes can occur, and advocate for the unique needs of specific populations such as youth and Indigenous peoples. A Place to Call Home advocates for a whole systems wrap around approach that meets youth where they are and provides resources for whatever challenges they face included in the key strategy areas listed above.

The federal government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funds homelessness prevention, emergency response and services and supports in designated communities across the country. The Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation currently hosts Community Entities for Brandon, Rural and Remote funding as well as Aboriginal funding through the HPS program. Funding through HPS Brandon is targeted at implementing Housing First as well as support services, with youth identified as a unique population that requires attention and funding. Care should be taken to ensure that youth’s unique housing needs are accounted for in Housing First models implemented in Brandon.

Recently the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation partnered with the Rural Development Institute on a student led project to develop a poverty report framework for Brandon. Through research and community meetings including consultation with A Place to Call Home committee members, researchers noted that often the data required to make informed decisions may be available, but come from a vast array of sources and is not easily aggregated or disseminated.

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Our entire assistance cheque go to pay rent
and we are always left with nothing for a few days after the rent is paid
The framework developed by students and Brandon University is the basis for creating a poverty compass that will track housing affordability, income and demographics on an annual basis using data sources that already exist as well as improvements to those systems on an ongoing basis. Whether used as a tool to measure success of projects, or to justify funding for new programming, this type of report would be of use to a number of organizations and groups to inform policy and decision making.

We also know through services offered by Samaritan House, that hamper usage is up to over 1600 hampers given out each month with over 50% of those hampers going to people under the age of 30. Helping Hands Soup Kitchen serves over 100 daily lunches Monday to Friday with statistics indicating that more than 50% of those who use the service are under the age of 30 and many of them with children.

Whether we look at food bank, waiting lists for social housing, or at the reports and plans that try to address these issues, it is clear that youth poverty and homelessness is a problem in our city. This problem, requires joint collaboration from all levels of government and community to target resources towards prevention and reduce the number of youth who transition from homes to homeless situations which leave them at risk and vulnerable.

While federal, provincial and local strategies advocate for reductions in homelessness, the do not always align with each other well enough to work towards similar goals. Language differences between The All Aboard Strategy and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy have led some communities to focus more heavily on emergency responses, and leave less money targeted at prevention programs and services.
Brandon serves as a geographic service hub for approximately 180,000 people in the South Western region of Manitoba both in terms of services such as healthcare, employment and education. The city of Brandon has two secondary institutions, Brandon university and Assiniboine Community College; and a strong manufacturing sector with Maple Leaf Foods and Koch Fertilizer. Prairie Mountain Health was formed in June, 2012 following the amalgamation of the province’s former regional health authorities of Assiniboine, Brandon and Parkland. The region covers 67,000 square kilometers and serves a population of 167,121 (PMH Health Census, 2013). Within the region there are 22 acute care sites, 42 long term care sites, 5 primary health care centres and 39 emergency medical service facilities (ambulance). The map below shows the Prairie Mountain Health boundaries which are close if not identical to the southwestern service region of the province. The geographic size of this region creates many challenges related to service provision and programming that affect how we can respond to youth in crisis as well as how we prevent and end youth homelessness in Brandon. Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked, and the All Aboard survey respondent’s experience is very similar to many people in Brandon. People who live in poverty are frequently unable to pay for necessities such as housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Being poor can mean a person is one illness, one accident, or one paycheck away from living on the streets. When this person is also a youth, the danger or risk of transitioning in and out of homelessness and other precarious situations is much higher.
“In my own community, there is no affordable housing strategy, the vacancy rate is well below 1%, and the number of families regularly relying on food banks is increasing. The gap is growing and very little is being done to stop it. Taxes, housing prices and the cost of living keep going up, but wages certainly do not grow at the same rate.” – All Aboard, 2013 Survey Respondent

For youth who are not able to access services in their own community in this region, many times the best option is moving to a central location, that offers the services they require, like Brandon or Winnipeg. For example, a lack of resources in northern communities in the Prairie Mountain Health Region may result in some youth with mental illnesses are not diagnosed in early stages. Often youth do not receive supports until they have had a complete breakdown, or end up in crisis before services are offered, and many times this requires relocation to a larger centre like Brandon. The need for more resources is clearly illustrated in Prairie Mountain Health’s Community Health assessment which states: “Often symptoms of mental illness arise in youth but are not recognized. Early recognition and intervention is critical to developing healthy emotional and social development. There is greater demand for resources to support developing resilience and coping skills. Although it is much needed, there is currently no system that is responsible for this.” (Page 184, PMH Community Health Assessment).

Cookies baking in the oven, going to sleep in my bed at night with my cat sleeping on me.
Brandon as a Geographic Service Hub Continued

While some data looks at patterns of migration and service provision as well as poverty and homelessness indicators, there is a lack of evidence that can be compiled to assist in policy change and resource and programming development. For example, The Migration and Homelessness Interim Report 1: Existing Data August, 2012 compiled and assessed current information the suggests: “About half (48%) of people accessing services from the Housing Resource Workers are from Brandon, and another 16% are from the adjacent Regional Health Authority (Assiniboine, 9%) or another Manitoba RHA (6%). The remaining 36% are from another province or country. In June of 2009 the ‘other province/country’ category was split into two separate categories. During this time, 84% of the combined category was comprised of people from out of country. Overall, this means that, from June 2009 until December 2011, 30% of people accessing services from the Housing Resource Workers were from out-of-country. Information on Aboriginal status was not collected until October 2011. In the four months for which we have data, 50% of people accessing services identified themselves as Aboriginal.” (Migration and Homelessness Interim Report 1: Existing Data August 2012, page 9)

There’s different kinds of homes, not just for people but for everyone, way up high in the sky or at the bottom of the ocean, the land and the sky is all our home. – Maya
“Often symptoms of mental illness arise in youth but are not recognized. Early recognition and intervention is critical to developing healthy emotional and social development. There is greater demand for resources to support developing resilience and coping skills. Although it is much needed, there is currently no system that is responsible for this.” – Allan, J. et. Al., Prairie Mountain Health Community Health Assessment, 2015
Youth Diversity

This plan aims to account for, and be mindful of the unique needs of all youth regardless of background or abilities. Whether youth are below the age of majority, or nearing the age of 30, Indigenous, newly immigrated to the Brandon area or identify as LGBT2QS they deserve to be treated with respect and offered supports and services that meet their needs. Often youth have higher needs and require unique responses that are culturally sensitive and appropriate and do not make them feel more vulnerable. Additionally, youth may not reach out to access services until close to or during an emergency situation because of a real or perceived barriers in accessing services.

Youth often face unique barriers that may be compounded when a youth identifies as part of a marginalized or often discriminated against group. Along with discrimination, or difficulty communicating in English, many youth are not able obtain the help they need. Recently, the Government of Manitoba released a statement indicating that they are going to discontinue issuing cheques for social services, and will only deposit assistance directly to bank accounts. While this is a good step towards better privacy, youth trying to access services may face barriers. Youth without a bank account or formal ID would need those items in place before being able to apply for or receive government assistance. Youth who have recently re-located may not know how or where to obtain ID documents, or what supporting documents (A social Insurance number, health card) are required. A recent announcement to combine Manitoba health cards with driver’s licenses will alleviate some of these concerns, but youth especially will need help navigating the system to obtain supporting documents.

Youth also face barriers attempting to secure permanent housing such as the inability to sign a lease and produce references for private landlords. Wait times for social housing in Manitoba are extensive, and people who reach out to social services are often advised that finding housing in the private sector may be a quicker option. When youth have multiple barriers such as a lack of ID, references, prior housing history, not to mention mental health or addictions issues, securing housing becomes a much longer process for many.
Community Planning & Participation

The work needed to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness in Brandon relies on non-profit organizations and the community as a whole working in partnership with each other, funders, municipal, provincial and federal governments and agencies. Brandon agencies connected through the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee and Community Mobilization Hub as well as Brandon Housing First have broken down many of the barriers that existed between organizations in the past. In fact, many non-profits in Brandon have good working relationships, but need to connect better with policy makers to ensure future work is supported. As a result of collective efforts to streamline emergency responses, residents who are experiencing homelessness are guided to the services they need faster. Of course, this work must continue, and in fact be enhanced as we move from emergency responses to targeted prevention measures. Care must be taken to ensure that those who serve on multiple boards and committees are supported. To do this, collaboration must have achievable milestones while ensuring human resources as well as bricks and mortar are funded and sustainable long term.
Implementation

Communities often write plans, only to have them sit on shelves without further action. This plan includes implementation guidelines, and next steps towards preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness in Brandon. Additionally, a Strategic Framework for plan implementation by the committee has been developed and will be released in April of 2016.

As the process of eliminating youth homelessness is complex, it will require partnership and broad stakeholder engagement from local groups, municipalities, the provincial and federal governments.

The application of this plan will be reinforced by research and evaluation that effectively capture the implementation and sustainability of this document A Place to Call Home, and the accompanying Strategic Framework. In order to evaluate whether implementation is working and compare ourselves to other similar sized communities with similar situations, we must ensure that approaches are supported at all levels, and progress is monitored on an ongoing basis.

Collaborate

- Hire a plan implementation manager and/or a project coordinator(s) supported by A Place to Call Home Steering Committee to work with community groups, strategic partners and funders to ensure implementation of the plan.
- Participate in provincial planning processes to end youth homelessness in the Province of Manitoba.
- Establish a youth led group and hire youth leaders as necessary, that will work with the A Place to Call Home Steering Committee to ensure that the voices of youth with lived experience impact policy and program design and decisions.

Plan and Execute

- Monitor measurable outcomes and benchmarks for Year 1, 2 & 3 of plan implementation. This may include cost benefit measures, and measure to determine the effectiveness of implemented action items.
- Development of consistent data collection and sharing methodologies.
- Develop evaluation methods to monitor effectiveness of programs and services, and to guide prevention and support based programming.
- Ensure that local plans integrate with other multi-jurisdictional homelessness and poverty reduction planning processes.
- Solidify strategic funding partnerships locally, provincially and nationally for the implementation of A Place Called Home.

Measure and Evaluate

- Share outcomes and benchmarks for Year 1, 2 & 3 goals and priorities of A Place to Call Home: Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness.
- Collect consistent data with sharing methodologies.
- Monitor effectiveness of programs and services, and use results to guide prevention and support based programming.
- Assess current services and resources to uncover existing gaps and identify further opportunities that will prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.
- Continue collaboration with national partners on the National Youth Homelessness Prevalence Survey and further research regarding youth homelessness.
Shared accommodations mean lack of space to do the things we love that make it feel like home... like baking.
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If it’s temporary housing, and if you are new to Brandon, It doesn’t feel like it’s yours
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Not having the support from the agencies that we thought we’d have
Steering Committee

Chair

Gail Cullen
Executive Director, Brandon Friendship Centre

Co-Chair

Dwayne Dyck
Executive Director, Youth for Christ Westman

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Grant McKay
Constable, Brandon Police Services

Pat Vera
Teacher, Neelin Off Campus

Karen Peto
Executive Director, YWCA Brandon

Susan Spring
Community Entity HPS Coordinator for Brandon, Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation
**Prevention**

- Develop and support existing family reconnect programs that are led by youth and families, authentic, relationship focused, and accessible to all youth.

- Work with Child and Family Services agencies and local Corrections services to develop more cohesive organizational plans to help youth move out of care and make successful transitions in their lives.

- Increase family supports for early intervention on domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health by connecting them with existing services.

- Increase staff support for the Community Mobilization Hub as necessary.

- Build resilience and skills that improve cognitive processes and behaviors in by advocating for resources in schools targeted at youth in crisis, and impoverished youth.

- Promote dialogue in schools by connecting children to mental health supports earlier and educating all students about warning signs regarding pathways into homelessness.

**Housing and Supports**

- Increase access to information for all youth, using multiple communications strategies to improve system navigation.

- Encourage agencies to offer and expand life-skills training for at-risk youth.

- Develop creative arts programming that is youth friendly, barrier free and offers a creative outlet for youth.

- Expand mobile health care supports for youth ages 16 – 19, by collaborating with multiple agencies including; drop in centres, schools, and the regional health authority.

- Support social enterprises that include job training, life skills, income generation & pairs vulnerable youth with mentors in the community.
HOUSING AND SUPPORTS CONTINUED

- Employ or continue to employ youth navigators and housing coordinators to advocate and assist the most vulnerable and at-risk youth.

- Expand the definition of Housing First to include a framework of Housing First for Youth.

- Develop a landlord strategy in partnership with Brandon Housing First to ensure independent and diverse housing options are available and affordable for youth.

- Expand housing options to include transitional housing, host homes, permanent supportive housing as well as independent living.

- Assess rules and regulations for transitional housing to ensure equitable treatment of all, including Indigenous and LGBT2SQ youth.

- Work with community partners to ensure that permanent housing is accessible and affordable to all youth in crisis.

- Streamline the process to access land for new affordable housing, including abandoned land with environmental impacts.

- Develop supportive and mixed income housing that includes youth housing.

- Examine emergency housing systems and integrate rapid rehousing models to stabilize and reunite youth with families as quickly as possible.

INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF CARE

- Implement a common assessment tool for youth service providers that is clear, concise, and allows for quick targeting of youth to needed resources.

- Collect data from the common assessment tool for monitoring and evaluation of implementation success measures over time.

- Support a system of care that coordinates activities of youth serving agencies with systems partners.

- Prevent youth from falling through gaps in the system of care by establishing collective principles and values between organizations.

- Develop a youth-led group to engage with the public through community partnerships with organizations such as Youth Revolution and Brandon Urban Aboriginal Peoples’ Council.
INTEGRATED SYSTEMS PLANNING

- Fund an implementation manager and/or project coordinator(s) and supporting staff to oversee, implement and work with partners on the recommendations of this plan. Prioritize hiring youth with lived experiences.

- Assist with research and development for a provincial plan to end youth homelessness that focuses on providing resources in youth’s home communities.

- Advocate for provincial systems of care across rural and remote communities, with appropriate exit planning for all youth.

- Retool and coordinate government systems that currently deal with youth who enter into homelessness.

- Promote expanded services in rural and remote communities by sharing data and planning collaboratively across all systems provincially and federally.
A PLACE TO CALL HOME
Brandon’s Plan to End Youth Homelessness