

# Homelessness should have a human face...



Sooner or later someone you encounter in your office, classroom, clinic or workplace will be at risk of homelessness.

In that moment, you can make the difference between a temporary crisis and a human tragedy.

You know their stories: management sweeps, relationship breakdowns, young people in conflict or fleeing abuse, addiction, illness, emotional distress ...

Today, the spiral from stability to distress can start in the space of a five-minute meeting.

Here are some facts that can help you. No one needs to feel helpless in the face of homelessness. Often, all it takes is knowing who to call.

As someone who works with people, your network already includes a wide range of resources that can help you prevent another family or individual from hitting the streets. And, your network can be expanded.

- TAKE the challenge.
- COMMIT to finding the people with the resources your residents, clients, patients, students or employees need to prevent their own homelessness.
- LEARN about the issue.
- TALK with your colleagues.
- SPREAD the word.
- GET INVOLVED TODAY!

Chances are that organizations in your community are helping people face the issue of homelessness with human solutions that really work.

Why not join them?  
Short of time this year?

Your donation to Raising the Roof supports community-based programs with the goal of finding long-term solutions for Canada's homeless.

Take homelessness personally.  
Your support makes a difference.



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Children and youth have been “couch surfing” since before the expression existed. Many have been connected to the child welfare system before, after and sometimes during their stints of “crashing” with friends or older siblings. “Street kids” are often the most visible facet of homelessness, particularly when they congregate in urban centres. Some flee their parental homes, while others flee the foster homes in which they’ve been placed. If they were wards of the state for child protection reasons, when they turn 18 years old, they “graduate” into the world with few networks and less support from adults.

Raising the Roof’s website ([www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org)) offers examples of how community and child welfare agencies can provide tailored supports to youth, as well as services to help keep families together, where appropriate, and reduce the number of children and youth who are placed in care in the first place. You’ll find details on the goals, funding and delivery agencies of these innovative practices, along with more sources of information, including a library of the best print and electronic information sources on how child welfare agencies can contribute to the prevention of homelessness.

understand the issue

know and watch for the warning signs

When it comes to homelessness, there is no single test to determine who is “at risk”. Whether you are working as a child protection worker or in services for street kids, you see how fragile the world can be for youth without stable housing. You know that children and youth are unlikely to volunteer information about private issues such as job loss, poverty, family conflict, substance abuse, victimization by gangs, recruitment attempts by prostitution rings, and domestic violence or abuse. In the course of your work with them, however, you are likely to uncover such realities.

Watch for these warning signs: no phone number or address, lack of skills necessary for stable employment, lack of a healthy support network of peers, family or mentors, past experiences with the criminal justice system or mixing with gang members, and unstable, often very low incomes.

You can make a difference by referring these youth to appropriate agencies and services in your community, so they get the housing and supports they need in order to stabilize their lives. Once people are homeless, their ability to get their life “normalized,” as well as the effort required to reconnect them to supports and opportunities, increases exponentially.

You can help. Your programs offer opportunities to these children and youth. You can make sure they are the programs most likely to help them become adults with stable lives. Your voice can have a powerful impact. Become an advocate for your clients and for others at risk of homelessness in your community.

## connect with or create the homelessness prevention team in your community

**N**o one can prevent homelessness alone. Growing awareness of the cause-and-effect relationship between homelessness and the "normal" life course for children and youth who have been part of the child protection system or street culture has created networks of service providers coming together to shape an effective community response – from housing, financial and service groups, to government and policy people, to city planners, to employment and education services, to landlords and private businesses.

If such a group does not exist in your community, consider taking the lead to form your own network. Talk to other agencies involved in programs like yours. Recruit teachers, bankers, employers and others in your community, to extend homelessness awareness to all of those who can be part of its prevention in the course of their daily work. Your community's legal aid, community health, and employment, education, social services and supportive housing agencies are valuable resources to know. Take steps today so you'll know who to call when you need solutions or referral options for the young people you encounter in the course of your work.

Help organize to research, create and support existing homelessness prevention strategies. Ensure that strategies tried in your community and the lessons learned are shared widely to help everyone act together to prevent homelessness. Sometimes, your collective work will lead to innovative community practices, like those available on the Raising the Roof website at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org). (You'll find lots of ideas here, many specific to youth, for reference and inspiration.)

**Y**ou know how instability, including insecure housing, affects the children and youth in your programs or care. And, you know the well-being of your communities is also at stake. Write, discuss the issue and make your voice heard. Tell your elected officials what you see and what you want done about it. Become an advocate for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Support the development, funding and protection of affordable housing in your community. Work with others to make the need for stable housing a community issue. Collectively take some responsibility for making things better for the children and youth who are your clients. Your commitment adds credibility to the voice calling on private and public sector leaders to take the actions necessary to end the individual human tragedy and the collective harm it causes. Actively support programs and initiatives in other sectors aimed at preventing the root causes of homelessness – locally, provincially and federally.

you know homelessness has a major impact on your community  
make sure others know, too

