

Today's Patterns of Youth Homelessness in Toronto

What you need to know

Youth are mainly driven to the streets for reasons that are beyond their control and are forced into situations that are unsafe and threatening. There are clear patterns in the ways that youth become homeless and in their leaving the streets. For the most part, youth become homeless because they have no other choice. Reasons include: youth are kicked out of their homes; they flee situations of abuse; or they are released from foster care.

What is this research about?

The city of Toronto has undergone significant changes in governments, demographics, and services available to street-involved youth in the past two decades. This research is about discovering and learning about the impact that these changes

have had on the needs of street-involved youth in Toronto. This research was conducted to create a better understanding of what street-involved youth need today and what changes agencies serving homeless youth need to implement to meet those needs.



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www.homelesshub.ca
for more information

KEYWORDS

street-involved youth, support services, education

ARTICLE SOURCE

The report *Changing Patterns for Street Involved Youth* was published by Public Interest in 2009.

Summary Date: December 2010

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Amongst the many findings that emerged from this study, included were:

- Immigrant youth have unique needs;
- Age of arrival on the street has an impact on the patterns of homelessness;
- Youth reported moving around and changing their sleeping locations frequently;
- Youth indicated that they were increasingly choosing to hangout and use services in Toronto's West downtown area;
- Youth reported daily challenges with: safety and comfort, income, and making long term plans and decisions;
- Social networks have a strong impact on the decisions that street-involved youth make;
- Youth rely heavily on support services for meeting their everyday needs and seek services with staff members who are engaged and responsive.



For more information on the Yonge Street Mission, visit: www.ysm.ca



What did the researchers do?

The Yonge Street Mission conducted a research study to determine and understand the changing needs of street-involved youth in Toronto. Dozens of interviews were completed with frontline and management staff at services providing support to street-involved youth in Toronto. Staff members were asked to answer questions regarding the

youth populations accessing their services most frequently and to identify the youth groups who were not accessing their services. Peer interviewers from the street-involved youth population interviewed 208 street-involved youth in the city of Toronto about their service needs. Street-involved youth also participated in focus groups.

How can you use this research?

This research can be used to provide **clear guidelines in developing and improving services** for street-involved youth, as this study clearly indicates the changing patterns of youth homelessness in Toronto today.

The findings can be used to **educate service providers, educators, and researchers**, as well as to **educate the broader public** on the current issues, needs, and barriers faced by street-involved youth.

Support services serving homeless youth can use this research and the recommendations made to help **enhance their programs** to meet the diverse and changing needs of street-involved youth.

This research can also be used to help

develop specialized services for street-involved youth. For example, this study indicates that agencies serving homeless youth have expressed challenges in providing support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth and that some respondents believe that there is need for a specific shelter for LGBT youth.

Respondents also stated that **mental health services must improve** and become more attuned to the needs of street-involved youth.

This study should undoubtedly be used by those working in the youth homelessness sector to generate more understanding towards a population of youth that have been **misunderstood and stigmatized** for much too long.