

United Way: Youth Policy Outcomes Summary

Youth homelessness:

The vast majority of homeless youth have not completed high school and therefore experience a lack of opportunities to secure training and employment and accessible, affordable, and suitable housing. Many have experienced physical, sexual and /or emotional abuse, violence and substance abuse, mental illness, and family instability.

Literacy & school attendance:

Young people who face significant reading challenges are less likely to finish high school and are at risk of other personal and social problems.

Poverty:

Poverty has a number of negative influences on the development of children both physically and mentally and thus is one of the main barriers in the way for youth to reach their potential.

Substance use & addiction:

Early experience with substance use and hazardous patterns of drug-using behaviour during adolescence are serious risk factors for developing long-standing problems, including dependence that continues into adulthood. Risk factors for problematic substance use also overlap with risk factors for other negative outcomes such as criminal and violent behaviour.

Mental health issues:

Mental health concerns can range from an overall appreciation of the level of stress in their lives, to recurring feelings of depression and even suicidality

Lack of transportation access:

Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are almost invariably transportation-disadvantaged, especially those in rural locations outside of towns.

Violence & crime:

Violence/bullying at home, school and in the neighbourhoods can have negative consequences for the physical and mental development of children. Over the past several years, there has been an increase in reported youth violence and youth gang activity in both large and small Canadian communities

SOLUTIONS

1 Education & Employment

Young persons need sustainable access to affordable education, literacy, skill development, training opportunities and employment opportunities. A well resourced educational system is crucial in order to meet the varied needs of students. Schools and programs also need to provide youth with greater support in the transition period from school to work as well as attempt to respond to youth unemployment and underemployment.

2 Health & Safety

Recognizing that homelessness is a central issue among youth, there is a strong need to support specific programs which provide quality housing services for youth. There is a need for adequate youth specific shelter and beds. Youth need immediate access to mental health services. Violence prevention and bullying awareness programs should be developed and implemented throughout schools and community organizations to try to address the issues involved in youth violence and bullying. Programs directed at assisting youth with substance abuse issues should be easily accessible and relevant to their needs.

3 Community Engagement & Inclusion

Affordable and accessible recreation significantly enriches the lives of youth and in turn, their communities. Recreational opportunities offer children and youth many significant benefits, such as: development of leadership, decision-making, problem solving skills, improved self-esteem, academic performance, relationships, better physical and emotional health. Encouraging formation of youth clubs/committees in the community can help them to engage in community affairs.

4 Access & Equity

Youth must be able to access the services that are being made available to them and have access to such opportunities on an equitable basis. Services need to be also gender and culturally relevant. Rural transportation issues are a concern that must be addressed immediately.