# Bridging the Gap's Host Homes Program:

## Process & Outcomes Evaluation

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# Acknowledgements

# Executive Summary

**What is Bridging the Gap's Host Homes Model?**

The Host Homes model is an alternative to shelters and transitional housing services for young people at-risk of becoming homeless. It is an example of place-based youth homelessness prevention, meaning that the program is located in the young person's own community. Bridging the Gap is the first program to operate under the Host Homes model in Ontario and has been in existence for 10 years. The program is located in Halton Region and predominately works with young people at-risk of homelessness in smaller communities (i.e., Oakville, Georgetown, Milton, Acton). The program serves young people ages 16-24 who are considered to be low risk.

**Context of the Evaluation**

Raising the Roof received funding from the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness (ISH) contribution administered by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada. As part of this contribution, funding was dedicated to a third-party evaluator to assess the program theory and outcomes of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program. Hub Solutions, a social enterprise embedded in the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, served as the third-party evaluator and partnered with Raising the Roof to develop a fulsome understanding of their program.

**The evaluation had five main goals:**

1. *To establish the program theory and develop a program logic model;*
2. *To examine the contextual factors impacting the Host Homes model;*
3. *To assess the outcomes of young people who participate in the Host Homes program;*
4. *To determine the strengths of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program;*
5. *To determine how Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program could be improved.*

# Evaluation Methodology

***Our methodology included five main components:***

1. *Development and refinement of the program logic model;*
2. *Key informant interviews with seven Bridging the Gap staff members;*
3. *Interviews with four young people who were enrolled in the Host Homes program;*
4. *Interviews with two Host Home providers;*
5. *Surveys with four young people who were enrolled in the Host Homes program.*

# Key Findings

***What is the program theory?***

Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program is closely following the model of other Host Home programs. The program provides housing that allows young people to stay in their own communities and offers comprehensive supports to young people and Host Home providers via a Host Homes support worker. Through this model, the program is successfully diverting young people from the shelter system. Related to the program theory, the key program components were described as:

1. Safe, secure, and no-cost housing located in a young person's own community; and
2. Supports offered by the Host Homes worker, the Host Homes providers, and the young people.

### *What are the contextual factors impacting Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program?*

- The Bridging the Gap program was largely impacted by the geographic dispersion of Halton Region. Given this dispersion and the lack of public transportation available in the region, providing transportation to young people was deemed as vital and the main program adaptation.

- Other contextual factors included the lack of affordable housing in Halton Region, the lack of social opportunities for young people, and the partnerships made by the program.

- The partnership with the Children Aid's Society was particularly valuable.

### *What are the outcomes of young people in the program?*

- The outcomes of the program were generally positive. Young people were satisfied with the quality of their housing and felt that their housing and neighbourhoods had positive impacts on their lives. Young people also stated that their health and wellbeing improved as a result of being a part of the Host Homes program.

- Several young people stated that the stability offered by the Host Homes program allowed them to focus on finishing school and engage in recreational activities, such as physical fitness and dance. Host providers also noted that young people were achieving their educational goals, as some young people were moving onto college and university.

### *What are the strengths of the program?*

- •Young people appreciated the program's ability to provide a safe place to live, the supports that were offered by the host providers, and the hope that resulted from being a part of the program. Hope was described as the opportunity to set goals for oneself.

- Host providers thought that the strength of the program was its ability for hosts to give back to the community and in watching the resiliency of young people in the program.

**What are the strengths of the program?**
*(cont'd)*

- Program staff shared that the strength of the program was its responsiveness to both young people and host providers, as well as the program's success in diverting young people from the shelter system.

**What were the challenges experienced by the program?**

- The program experienced a limited number of challenges. One young person felt socially isolated in their Host Homes neighbourhood, while another young person could have benefited from a stronger relationship with their host provider.
- Host providers and program staff thought that more Host Homes are needed within Halton Region. Program staff also felt that Halton Region residents could benefit from more education on homelessness in general.
- Program staff discussed some challenges related to the program structure, such as addressing harm reduction, rule breaking, the engagement of older young people, and engaging host providers.

**Recommendations for the program**

Based upon the findings from the evaluation, a series of recommendations were developed for program improvement and sustainment.

1. **Expand Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program across Halton Region**. *As a result of its success, the program should be expanded across Halton Region.*

2. **Enhance the marketing strategies for Host Home recruitment and dedicate resources to recruitment**. *In order for the program to expand, marketing strategies will need to be enhanced so that the number of host providers is increased.*

3. **Review Bridging the Gap's intake assessment procedures**. *In order to ensure that young people are a good fit, the intake assessment procedures of Bridging the Gap's Host Home program should be reviewed.*

4. **Review Bridging the Gap's current service delivery model**. *More specifically, services targeting family and natural supports, alcohol and substance use, engaging*

## Recommendations for the program
*(cont'd)*

*older young people, and community integration. The program model was responsive and young people and host providers felt supported by their Host Homes worker. Areas that the program could enhance include family and natural supports, harm reduction, engaging older young people, and enhanced social opportunities.*

5. ***Further strengthen the Host Homes model within a Housing First for Youth framework.*** *Host Homes are part of the broader housing options within the Housing First for Youth framework. As such, Bridging the Gap should continue to align their work under the Housing First for Youth model and pay particular attention to youth voice, youth choice, and self-determination.*

6. ***Ensure that culturally appropriate supports are offered to all young people***. *Given the diversity of Halton Region, it will be important for Bridging the Gap to ensure that young People of Colour feel adequately supported. Bridging the Gap should continue to foster partnerships with local community agencies that provide cultural supports.*

7. ***Provide more peer support opportunities to host providers***. *Host providers offer a unique service to young people. As such, opportunities should be made available for host providers to come together to share their experiences and support one another.*

8. ***Continue to monitor the impact of the program through research and evaluation***. *This evaluation highlighted the important work of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program. It will be important to capture more longitudinal data to determine the long-term impact of the program.*

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# Section 1:
# Background of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes Program

The Host Homes model is an alternative to shelters and transitional housing services for young people at-risk of becoming homeless. It is an example of place-based youth homelessness prevention, meaning that the program is located in the young person's own community. The Host Homes model is unique in that it provides an opportunity for community members to get involved in solutions to youth homelessness.

Bridging the Gap is the first agency to offer a Host Homes program in Ontario and has been in operation for 10 years. The program is located in Halton Region and predominately works with young people at-risk of homelessness in smaller communities (i.e., Oakville, Georgetown, Milton, Acton). Given the geographic dispersion of Halton Region, the Host Home approach is used in an attempt to address a young person's needs from a place-based approach. Partnered with a family mediation strategy, this program serves young people ages 16-24 who are considered to be low risk. Young people generally stay in the program for six months to a year. More recently, Bridging the Gap has been housed as a program arm of the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS).

# Section 2:
# Context of the Evaluation

Raising the Roof received funding from the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness (ISH) contribution administered by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada. As part of this contribution, funding was dedicated to evaluate the program theory and outcomes of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program. Hub Solutions, a social enterprise embedded within the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, partnered with Raising the Roof to develop a fulsome understanding of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program.

The intention behind the project was to build the capacity of Bridging the Gap, execute a fulsome program evaluation, and share the model with other organizations looking to offer an effective Host Homes program. By undergoing a program evaluation, Bridging the Gap is better equipped with the information required to appropriately tailor programming to meet the needs of their community.

**The evaluation addressed the following questions:**

1. *What is the program theory of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program?*
2. *What are the contextual factors that may impact the implementation of the Host Homes program?*
3. *What are the outcomes of young people who participate in the Host Homes program?*
4. *What are the strengths of the Host Homes program?*
5. *How can the Host Homes program be improved?*

This document provides the key learnings of the evaluation. It begins with a brief literature review on the Host Homes model, followed by a description of the evaluation methods, and a presentation of the results. An interpretation of the results and recommendations stemming from these results conclude the document.

# Literature Review

In Canada, addressing homelessness has largely taken an emergency-focused approach. Programs such as emergency shelters and drop-in centers are used to provide assistance to someone after they have become homeless. Shelter diversion programs take a step back and look at creating a system where there is not a reliance on emergency shelters to support young people, but rather a focus on providing alternatives before a young person becomes homeless.

The underlying goal of shelter diversion is to help young people transition to stability and prevent homelessness. This is best done by providing young people with locally-based supports, drawing on the resources that exist in the community, and by giving young people temporary housing options (with extended family, friends, religious institutions, etc.). This allows time to work through the problems that led to homelessness, ideally with case management support.

Shelter diversion is particularly useful for smaller and rural communities that do not have an emergency shelter or sufficient support programs. This allows a young person to stay in their home community rather than needing to leave all of their natural supports behind. It can also prevent the young person from becoming immersed in street culture or becoming institutionalized. Research has shown that when young people are forced to leave their communities and natural supports, their health and mental health worsen and they face increased challenges and problems (Gaetz, 2013).

## Host Homes Overview

Host Homes is a form of secondary prevention as it targets youth who are at imminent risk of homelessness or who have recently experienced homelessness (Nichols et al., 2017). The goal of this model is to immediately support young people by diverting them from shelter accommodation and towards a safe place for young people to stay with an adult or family member. With Host Homes, young people are given their own room and meals while the host family or adult serves as a support to the youth. On-going supports are also provided by a youth-serving agency. Host Homes may offer space for a couple days, a few weeks, months, or even years.

Combined with a family reunification strategy (when it is safe for the youth to do so), Host Homes gives youth and their family the ability to take a break and resolve issues causing conflict. This focus on family reunification can strengthen families and potentially shorten the length of time young people experience homelessness (Gaetz, 2013). For youth who are leaving care, Host Homes can ease the transition to independent living, reduce isolation, and prevent them from entering the youth homelessness system (Gaetz, 2013; Gaetz, 2017).

In some cases, host families are paid a per diem by the agency or government program running the Host Homes model to cover their costs and to reimburse funds they might lose by not being free to rent that space out. By providing a stipend, it may also allow an individual with a lower socioeconomic status, for example, to be able to afford to stay in their own home and maintain their independence. In other communities, the families are volunteers and there is no funding provided; this helps reduce the cost of homeless youth service provision.

Host Homes provide communities with a great deal of flexibility and ability to scale the program. This flexibility includes their use as both a replacement of emergency shelters and a use as longer-term transitional housing. By doing so, Host Homes enables their use in communities of varying sizes. From a cost perspective, Avenues for Homeless Youth has reported that because Host Homes do not rely on a fixed site for congregate living (including staff, capital, and operating expenditures) they can cost as much as 50% less per youth than congregate shelter options (Mirfendereski, 2017).

Host Homes also provide greater choice for young people, which can be a key contributor towards success. Youth do not get 'placed' into homes, but rather work with the community agency to choose which host family might best suit them. Additionally, youth are given an opportunity to nominate potential hosts from extended family and friends, or pre-existing supportive relationships (Gaetz, 2013). Host Homes is therefore an important complement to the existing youth-focused housing options.

# Existing Host Homes Programs

### *United Kingdom*

In the UK the most extensive and well-known Host Homes program is Nightstop (Depaul, UK). It operates in 40 communities (with over 500 volunteers). Nightstop provides community-based supports for young people aged 16-25 who are able to stay with a single adult, couple, or family for up to three weeks.

### *United States*

There are a number of communities across the United States that use Host Homes programs. Based in Minnesota, Avenues for Homeless Youth offers three different Host Homes programs that serve young people between the ages of 16 and 20: 1) GLBT Host Home Program – for LGBT-identified young people; 2) Minneapolis Host Home Program – for young people in the city of Minneapolis; and 3) Suburban Host Home Program – for young people in Hennepin County. In all these programs, a program manager supports hosts through regular contact, monthly meetings, and support groups. They engage with the host families through calls and meetings, including monthly support groups, monthly in-home meetings and two to three trainings per year.

Additional programs based in Minnesota are the YMCA Communities Host Homes program of the YMCA of greater twin cities, the Brainerd Host Home Program, the REACH drop-in center Host Home program and Rochester Host Home programs of the Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. All of these programs have short term stays for young people, with the Lutheran Social Services programs timeframe of 6 to 12 months.

Leech Lake Housing Authority in Minnesota has a Host Homes program with a more natural setting. Young people seeking support are usually taken in by family or friends. In these cases, the Leech Lake Housing Authority will financially support the costs incurred by the youth's stay. Young people aged 16 to 24 can stay in the program for 18 months or until they turn 25.

In Wisconsin, the La Crosse WI Host Home Program at the Family and Children's Center provides Host Homes to young people up to 21 years of age for up to six months' time. Only one young person is allowed to be in a host's home at a time and they are supported to live independently soon after they turn 21.

Youth Advocates of Sitka, Inc. (Sitka, Alaska) is another transitional living program where young people aged 5 to 21 can be placed with a host family for up to 18 months. It is deemed to be "Therapeutic Foster Care" and the terms "resource parents" and "resource homes" are used to refer to the host family placement. There is active involvement of resource parents for young people under 18, whereas young people 18 to 21 receive mentoring to develop independent living skills. Resource homes are given $30/child/day and have access to extensive training. They also become licensed by the state to serve in this manner.

The Host Homes program at the Bill Wilson Center in Santa Clara, California provides shelter for LGBTQ young people ages 18 to 24. Young people are able to stay with hosts for three to six months. Volunteer hosts receive ongoing training, have access to a case manager at all hours of the day, and are supported with a stipend.

New Host Homes programs are developing rapidly across the United States. The first Los Angeles based Host Homes program is in its pilot phase. Young people aged 18 to 25 are accepted into the program. St. Ambrose House in Baltimore, Maryland is piloting their Host Homes program as well. The pilot Host Homes program identifies, screens, and trains community members who receive a stipend and ongoing support from the Host Homes Coordinator. Young people aged 18 to 24 in need of immediate housing are accepted into the program.

## *Canada*

The Bridge Services in Kelowna, British Columbia has a Host Homes program that is funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Young people 19 years of age and under who have status with the Ministry — either through a voluntary care agreement or a youth agreement — are able to stay with hosts and are provided with warm meals and a safe place to sleep on a night-by-night basis. Hosts are trained and approved foster homes. There is no limit on how many nights these young people can stay with hosts. Young people in this program have access to all the other services provided by The Bridge.

Aura Host Homes is operated by the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary with three distinct components and is designed to serve only LGBTQ2S+ young people between the ages of 14 and 24. They provide services to a maximum of 10 young people at one time. Most of the young people they have worked with are 16-24 years old. Since not all youth are interested in a family setting because of age, life circumstances or trauma from their family of origin, Aura developed two complementary programs to support the traditional Host Homes model. Aura has a Standard Model where they match LGBTQ2S+ young people with adults or families that are LGBTQ2S+ themselves or who have awareness of and/or experience in that community. Host Homes providers are required to commit for at least one year and must be able to provide an extra room or suite in their home.

Family and Community Support Services in Cochrane, Alberta has a program called Safe Coach that follows the Host Homes model. Youth aged 13 to 24 stay with hosts and are provided with warm meals and a safe place to stay. Young people can stay with hosts for approximately 6 months, and both youth and hosts are supported by the Youth and Family Support Worker. Something unique about this program is that it is in a rural community, illustrating how Host Homes uses existing infrastructure in all types of communities.

OneROOF Youth Services in Kitchener, Ontario has a new Host Homes program modeled with Nightstop and Host Homes in mind. This program provides youth aged 16 to 25 with a place to stay for approximately 3 months.

## Implementation of Host Homes Programs

With the implementation of this program, it is important to keep possible issues in mind. All Host Homes programs have risk mitigation techniques that minimize issues in the implementation of their programs. Both young people and hosts are screened, vetted, and assessed. Additionally, hosts are trained and educated on how to support any young person in their homes. In Host Homes programs, young people are able to choose which of the available hosts they would like to stay with, which helps with the comfort and integration of the situation.

## Outcomes of Host Homes Programs

Existing Host Homes programs have proven strong outcomes. Youth Advocates of Sitka placed 54 young people between 2008-2012 with 96% of them transitioning to a safe living environment. It took an average of three

days to place a homeless youth and the average length of stay was seven months. They have trained, licensed, and supported 25 different resource homes in Sitka.

Additionally, Nightstop in the UK has provided 13,500 bed nights to young people in 2014. In an extensive evaluation, it was determined that "after staying at Nightstop, 21% returned to their families, 36% moved into supported housing, 14% obtained private accommodation, 11% moved into social housing and 14% moved in with a friend" (Gaetz, 2013, p. 58).

# Section 4:
# Methods

**The evaluation had five main goals:**

1.  *To establish the program theory and develop a program logic model;*
2.  *To determine the contextual factors impacting the delivery of the program;*
3.  *To determine the outcomes of the program;*
4.  *To assess the strengths of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program;*
5.  *To assess areas of improvement for Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program.*

The methods to achieve these goals are presented below.

## Logic Model Creation

In order to develop the program theory, several steps were taken. First, a rapid review of the literature on Host Homes was completed. This was followed by a review of program documentation. Once this information was collected, a draft logic model was created. The logic model was reviewed by the internal project team (Raising the Roof, Hub Solutions) and then verified by Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program manager.

## Key Informant Interviews

In order to examine the operations of the program and the contextual factors that impacted these operations, seven key informant interviews were conducted. The interviewees were program staff and the program manager. The semi-structured interviews focused on the Host Homes model, adaptations to the model, contextual influences, strengths, and challenges. One key informant chose to participate via written responses to the interview questions.

## Interviews with Young People

Qualitative interviews were conducted with four young people currently enrolled in the program. The young people were recruited via their Host Homes worker. Interviews were conducted in-person by the Raising the Roof team. The interviews focused on the young person's experience in the program, particularly the supports they received from the program and their host provider, strengths of the program, challenges of the program, and recommendations for program improvement. The interviews were semi-structured. Participants were compensated $50.

## Interviews with Host Providers

Qualitative interviews were conducted with two host providers currently providing housing to young people. The hosts were recruited via their Host Homes worker. Phone interviews were conducted by the Raising the Roof team. The interviews focused on their experience in the program, particularly the supports they received from the program, strengths of the program, challenges of the program, and recommendations for program improvement. The interviews were semi-structured. Participants were not compensated.

## Surveys with Young People

The Host Homes program distributed an online survey to its participants. Results were collected at entry into the program and again three months later. Four participants completed the baseline survey and three participants completed the follow-up survey. One individual was unable to complete the follow-up survey. Participants were compensated $25 for their baseline survey and $25 for their follow-up survey.

Below we provide a brief overview of the specific measures used in the survey.

**Demographics.** At baseline, we asked participants their age, gender, sexual orientation, racial-ethnic identity, Indigenous identity, and country of birth.

**Housing**. At baseline and follow-up, participants were asked of their current housing situations. At follow-up, participants were asked if they had moved since their baseline survey.

**Toro's Instrument** (Toro et al., 1997) (Housing Quality). Participants were asked to rate their current housing on a scale of 1 (very bad) to 7 (very

good) on the following dimensions: comfort, safety, spaciousness, privacy, friendliness, and quality. The total score ranges from 6 to 42, with higher scores indicating greater housing quality.

***Quality of Life for Homeless and Hard-to-House Individuals*** (Hubley, Russell, Gadermann, & Palepu, 2009) (Housing Impact). Participants were asked to rate their current housing and neighbourhood conditions. This included quantitative and qualitative questions. Participants were asked to rate the impact of their housing and neighbourhood situation on a scale of 1 (large negative impact) to 7 (large positive impact). Open-ended questions focused on what participants like best and least about their housing and neighbourhoods.

***Healthcare utilization***. At baseline and follow-up, participants were asked if they had accessed an emergency room, a family doctor/general practitioner, any other medical doctor, and/or a dentist. At baseline, participants were asked to recall their service use in the past 12 months. At follow-up, participates were asked to recall their service use since their baseline survey.

***Program satisfaction***. At the follow-up survey, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction of the program on a 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied) scale.

# Data Analysis
### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

All interview recordings were transcribed. The qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach. The evaluation team started by independently coding the same transcript. After, the evaluation team met to compare and contrast their codes to ensure codes matched and to check-in to see if there were any differences. Where different codes emerged, a discussion took place for each team member to explain their codes and talk through the differences until a consensus was achieved. Following this process, each team member was assigned different transcripts to code.

Each transcript was coded line-by-line and in the language of each participant (in vivo coding). Following the completion of coding, the coded data was analyzed for differences and similarities across transcripts. From this process, themes developed and were used to organize the data.

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

# Section 5: Logic Model

## GOALS

**Primary:** To prevent and reduce youth homelessness by providing youth with safe supportive housing options within their home communities

**Secondary**: Connect youth to education, training, and employment (ETE) and counselling

## TARGET POPULATIONS

**Primary:** Youth in Halton Region
**Secondary:** Volunteer host families

## PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Youth experiencing/at-risk of homelessness, aged16-24, must be engaged in ETE

Volunteers with at least 1 free room in their home, undergo criminal record check

## INPUTS

**Funding**
$35 Per diem for hosts

**Staff**
3 FTE BTG Case workers
to connect with youth
Community members
willing to be hosts

**Training**
Outcome star training
Host training

**Space/Housing Options**
Host Homes varies based
on which homes are
available/ how many homes
are part of the program

**Hours of operation**
Youth are in the host's home
at any point of the day
BTG 24-& on call

## ACTIVITIES

**Screening and Referrals**
Screen youth and
hosts for eligibility
Referred from CAS, school etc..
Home inspection

**Interventions/ Case
Management**
Case Managers support
youth with:
Finding employment
Continuing education
Counselling or treatment
Youth volunteer in
the community
Hosts provide:
Food
Shelter
A place to shower
and do laundry
A safe space
A community connection
Advice and support
Ongoing support for hosts

**Financial Assistance**
OW for youth

**Rehousing**
Youth return home if safe
Bridge House program
Independent housing

**Aftercare**
Files kept open up to
2 months after
Family mediation
Ensuring stability

## OUTPUTS

**Youth**
Screening and Referrals
Number of youth were screened/ referred

**Interventions**
Number of youth in the program
Number of youth in counselling
Number of youth volunteering
Number of youth working
Number of youth in school
Number of youth who completed
their ETE goals
Number of youth who have been rehoused

**Financial Assistance**
Number of youth receiving OW

**Aftercare**
Number of closed files
Number of family mediation sessions
Number of meetings with youth

**Volunteer Hosts**
Screening and Referrals
Number of volunteers screened/referred
Number of volunteers accepted as hosts

**Interventions**
Number of trained volunteers
Number of homes in the program

**Financial Assistance**
Amount of per diem spent for hosts

**Aftercare**
Number of support meetings with hosts

## SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Youth's basic needs are met

Youth develop life skills

## MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

3-6 months in program

Youth are able to engage in education, training, and employment

## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

6 months - 1 year in program

Youth are provided links to legal, employment, mental health, physical health, and mentorship services

Socio-economic outcomes for youth are improved

Independent living and family reconnection

# Section 6:
# Process Evaluation Results

## Program Theory & Contexual Influences

This section presents the findings related to the program theory and the contextual influences. The results are taken from the interviews with young people, host providers, and key informants. The section focuses on: a) Program entry and profile of participants; b) Key program components; c) Supports provided by young people to other young people; d) Supports provided to host providers; e) Context; f) Adaptations to meet the local context; g) Strengths of the program; h) Challenges with the program; i) Advice for other hosts and young people; and j) Recommendations.

## Program Entry & Profile of Participants

### *Young People*

### Referrals to the Program and Intake Procedures

Young people were referred to the program through various systems, including school counsellors and other community agencies. A young person described their referral process in the quote below:

> " *I was talking to my social worker at school and she told me about how CAS has, like, this youth program, and how they can give you money in order to, like – because you don't live with your parents, all that kind of stuff. And when I went to work with them, they told me about Bridging the Gap, and then they bring [name of Host Home worker] in, and then that's how we all met.*

One young person described entering the program via the shelter system. While in the shelter, they were asked if they were interested in the Host Homes program. They shared:

> " So, I was in shelter and people who was working with me – my worker, she bring me to Bridging the Gap. Like [mentions worker's name] she helped me for everything. She gave me the option Host House or room for rent and I chose the Host House. She helped me, she took me to the place to see and she helped me do the paper work.

### Entry into Host Provider Home

Young people were asked what it was like to enter their host's home. Participants expressed that they felt nervous prior to entering the host provider's home, but that they later enjoyed the experience. One young person did not feel nervous entering the house as they had previous experience living in a group home. They labeled the process as, "*no big deal*." One host provider described meeting with a young person at their school prior to the young person entering their home, which helped to normalize the Host Homes entry process.

### Profile of Young People

There was some discussion on the level of need among young people. It was thought that the Host Homes model fits best with young people with low level of needs; however, young people enrolled in the program were sometimes coming in with a higher level of need, particularly around mental health and substance use.

In terms of their previous living arrangements, half of the young people were couch surfing, while the other young people were living in an emergency shelter.

### *Host Providers*

### Recruitment of Host Providers

Host providers were asked how they became Host Homes providers. One host first heard of the program through a community agency they worked with, while the other host saw an advertisement in the local paper. Both hosts shared that they were considering fostering young people or adoption prior to enrolling in the Host Homes program.

### Referrals to the Program and Intake Procedures

Host providers described the program's enrolment process as relatively easy. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire and provide a Criminal Record Check and other provincial database checks. Upon approval, they had an interview with a Bridging the Gap staff member. Once a host provider was approved, a contract between Bridging the Gap and the host was developed. Contracts were also created for the host provider and the young person, and the young person and Bridging the Gap.

### Host Provider Profile

Key informants were asked about the profile of host providers in the program. One key informant stated that hosts often want to give back to their community and that some hosts may have personal lived experiences of housing insecurity as a young person. The key informant stated:

> *I mean a lot of the host providers, well the majority of the host providers, I think they come from a place of wanting to give back to their community...Maybe there was a time in their life where they could have used a program like the Host program and it wasn't around, or it wasn't an option for them.*

## Key Program Components

Key informants, hosts, and young people were asked about the key components of the Host Homes program. These were: 1) Housing (Safe, secure housing in the community; Housing at no cost); 2) Supports (Supports offered by the host provider; Supports offered by the Host Homes worker; Check-ins with host providers and young people; Providing the necessities) and 3) Essential skills of Host Homes workers.

## Housing
### *Safe, secure housing in the community*

Safe and secure housing located in a young person's community was the most commonly discussed theme. A key informant shared, "it provides a housing option for, again, people to stay hopefully in their own community. So key component for us is that, you know, we have Host Homes set up in each one of the cities that we serve."

### Housing at No Cost

Key informants expressed that having housing at no cost was also critical. This policy ensured that young people without sources of income could be enrolled into the program and access stable housing. A key informant shared:

> *Another component is affordability, so coming into a Host Home we have no cost for shelter. We do that with intent so that a person can come in without a source of income because often, our young people are just establishing themselves and h8ave to go through the application process for Ontario Works or find employment. So, it's important that it remain free of cost to young people.*

# Supports
## *Supports offered by Host Homes provider*

Young people reported feeling supported by their host provider. Hosts were described as providing basic necessities, such as food and laundry, and respecting the privacy of the young people. One young person shared that their host provider helped them to attain employment.

Host providers also fostered a sense of social inclusion among the young people. A host shared that they invite young people to family events and try to provide a family-like environment when young people enter their homes.

Although the hosts were sometimes unavailable, many of the young people reported receiving emotional supports from their host provider. A young person shared that their host provider was, "*pretty much supportive in just about any-anything.*"

One young person felt that their host provider was an acquaintance rather than someone they have a close personal relationship with. They stated:

> " *But when the mother, [name of mother of host family], is not at work, I do talk to her sometimes; she makes me dinner, we talk while I have dinner and all that kind of stuff. So it's a close relationship, but it's not like very close. It's not like we have an actual relationship. It's more or less acquaintances.*

## *Supports offered by Host Homes workers*

Key informants shared that they provided hosts with the following supports: mediation between young people and host providers; training; after-hour supports; and basic necessities (i.e., toiletries).

Each host provider has a dedicated Host Homes worker, resulting in a continuity of supports. The relationship between the Host Homes worker and the host provider was described as extending beyond a regular landlord-tenant relationship. A program staff member stated:

> " *So this is something I think the providers really feel good about rather than, say, advertising that they have a room for rent because once you establish a tenant, the relationships between you and that tenant it— you're on your own. Whereas connecting to our program, they know 1) they are helping someone, a young person who is in need, 2) they have*

on-going support from our staff, and 3) that that young person is more than likely gonna transition from their home into a situation that was better from which they came.

Staff members also shared that the supports they provide to young people are key. These supports were described as consistent and reliable. A staff member stated:

**"** *I think if they have somewhere stable to go, everything else will just kinda fall into place. So helping them kinda manage or navigate some of the issues that they've had—often times we're the only person that they do have, so just being that confidant I guess, or a friend or whatever they want to call us to kinda help them through the issues they're having.*

Young people stated that they received help accessing community and health services, particularly mental health services and developing life skills. Many of the young people spoke of the emotional supports they receive from their Host Homes worker. One young person stated that their worker:

**"** *Text[s] me and checks up on me. And he likes to make sure that I'm doing okay. And he'll text me and ask me, so – and I don't lie to him, if I don't go to school I'll tell him and he'll motivate me in that way.*

The importance of the relationship between caseworkers and young people was encapsulated in the following quote by a young person:

**"** *The emotional support that I do get from my workers is one of the best things that I have because not having parents it's more or less—it's very hard to find adults who are there for you to support you so, it's nice to have a worker there for me.*

### Check-ins with host providers and young people

*Program staff noted that they have weekly individual meetings with host providers and young people. Meetings with host providers can serve two purposes: 1) to see if host providers need supports, and 2) to share information on supports the young person may need. Checking in with host providers was important, as demonstrated by a quote from one of the key informants:*

*"Because I think we focus on so much about what the youth need and we're placing these youth – but it's also about the Host Home provider as well, right, and what is it that they need from us. And, so, that's where I try and check in regularly, go for coffee. And, you know, sometimes [they] need to talk about, like, personally what's going on for [them], right, just so that way I'm in the loop if there's a lot going on...Because I think so often we get into these modes where we just do our jobs because we love what we do, but we kind of forget that other people don't do this daily, right. Like, that's not what [the host provider] does on a regular basis; [the host provider] has [their] own life.*

### Providing the necessities

*Program staff, host providers, and young people all shared that the program offered young people basic necessities, such as food and laundry facilities. A young person discussed how these necessities were important and valued. They stated:*

*"It's sort of like my safe space because I don't live with my parents and I don't have somewhere to live so it's my place, so I can sleep, so I can have somewhere to eat, shower – all that kind of stuff. So, it does mean a lot to me because that's kind of the necessities I need in order to live.*

## Supports Provided by Young People to Other Young People

If there is more than one young person in the host provider's home, some young people stated that they receive supports from the other Host Homes participants. A young person shared that they learned from the other young people in the house and that it helped them to overcome their shyness.

## Supports Provided by Young People to Host Providers

Young people were asked of the types of supports they provide to host providers. The participants shared that they help out with household chores, such as cooking and cleaning. One young person shared that they would sometimes sit and talk with the host provider as means to provide social support to the host.

Hosts were also asked of the supports they receive from young people. One host provider stated that the young people have given them a new perspective on life. They explained that each young person comes with their own history and experiences, which has enlightened the host provider's perspective on life. The second host provider stated that some of the young people who have exited the Host Homes program still keep in contact with them. They stated that, "*they've had a lot of support from us ... and now they're giving it back to us.*"

## Context

Host providers, key informants, and young people shared some contextual factors impacting the implementation of the Host Homes program. These contextual influences were: 1) Affordable housing, 2) Lack of social opportunities, and 3) Partnerships.

### *Affordable housing*

Host providers mentioned the challenge young people face in accessing affordable housing in Halton Region. Private market housing was described as "*ridiculously expensive*" and affordable housing was described as "*like gold*" in the region. With many young people working minimum wage jobs or having difficulties attaining employment, the opportunities for housing that meet their affordability standards were limited.

### *Lack of social opportunities*

Host providers also discussed the lack of social opportunities that existed within the region. In particular, one provider shared an example of the reorganization of a local community program. This program served as a service hub and provided supports to all young people, not just those who experience or have experienced homelessness. Through their own advocacy efforts, young people who accessed the program were able to retain recreational services that were offered at the program, but the provision of other supports was no longer available.

### *Partnerships*

Key informants discussed a number of partnerships that they were engaged in. The most common were the school board, social assistance, funders, and the CAS. Schools are an important player in the Host Homes model, particularly as a source of outreach, but also as a collaborator. In discussing schools, one key informant shared:

*I'd say the school as well. We collaborate closely with the school, so again letting them know this is where their established residence is for the time being and what our case plan is going forward so that they feel like they understand what the needs of that young person is going to be in that time. Because obviously sometimes, you know, when your without housing attendance at school can be challenging.*

Social assistance agencies, particularly Ontario Works, were also described as key partners in the Host Homes model. Many young people come into the program without a stable source of income, so access to Ontario Works is essential. The relationship with Ontario Works workers was also important since the Host Homes model can be considered administratively unique. For example, a key informant stated:

*For the majority of our clients – I couldn't give you an actual statistic or percentage, but I would say the majority of our clients coming in don't have an established income from onset, so it's connecting with Ontario Works. And we've developed a really good understanding with the case managers that do the applications for young people around what the Host Home is and in terms of what their entitlements are because shelters at one point were—if you were a client in an emergency shelter, for instance, or if you were without housing, it was kind of undetermined whether or not you get a personal needs allowance or you get your basic needs, right. So, just to kind of explain the difference there – a personal needs allowance was 72 dollars a month, whereas a basic needs allowance was 321. So it's really working with Ontario Works to get them to understand that yes, this young person is not paying shelter but they're not in an emergency housing situation, they still need to be able to access their basic needs because these are the things that they're responsible for; their hygiene, supplies, their lunch items, transportation, etc. We were able to get them to do that which was fantastic.*

The most important partnership was with CAS. Being housed within CAS had several benefits, including access to resources, supports, and a sense of stability. The challenge of being housed within CAS was the misperception that the Host Homes program was operated by CAS workers. A key informant stated:

*The one thing that becomes a little bit awkward is that when we're advertising to our young people that relationship, right. So on our brochure, on our business card, on our website, we don't indicate that*

*we are connected to the Halton Children Aid Society. On the Halton Children Aid Society website, they make mention of the fact that they are housing our program. But when I'm approaching a young person, especially for the first time who may have had previous involvement with the Children's Aid Society from the protection standpoint of thing, their experiences they may not perceive as being very positive, and so they kind of—their first question is, "Okay, so if you work for the Halton Children's Aid, are you here to do what they did? Are you here to look at taking me away, or out of my parent's home?" And so, it's just being able to explain to them, "yes I'm housed there and yes I'm supported by the agency, but the work that I do is different from the work that a Child Protection Worker does, and that my service is voluntary, so you have to want to work with me and I can't tell you what you're gonna do."*

*Most young people were willing to engage with the program after workers explained the difference between Bridging the Gap and CAS, but there were still some young people that were unwilling to engage. This mostly stemmed from previous traumas experienced through involvement with CAS. For example, a key informant stated:*

If you have a person who can process that conversation well, you're good – but there are some people that come with significant trauma, that from the second they hear you work for the Children's Aid, the trust is out the window, the rapport is out the window, and they may not come back to our service. I would say that has very rarely happened. If I had to give it a percentage, I would say less than 1%, but it definitely is a conversation that needs to be had, and I think, if I'm playing devil's advocate, it's both a negative and positive in that it improves the reputation and the image that the Children's Aid Society has – Halton Region, Halton Children Aid specifically.

## Adaptations to Meet Local Context

The main adaptation to the Host Homes model was its emphasis on the transportation needs of young people. Given the geographic dispersion of Halton Region and the lack of public transportation, providing transportation to young people was deemed as vital. The importance of providing transportation is summed up in the following quote from a key informant:

*I would say that transportation is a huge part. Absolutely...It's a huge benefit to our ability to work effectively with clients because when you're utilizing public transportation and you're a person with no income or*

> *living in a fixed income, you cannot afford public transportation. Let alone when you are managing the struggle around figuring out your housing situation, finding permeant housing, connecting with mental health services or, you know, other sources of counselling; you've had trauma, there's family issues. You've got a lot going on in the brain— to then try to organize yourself around even the schedule of public transportation, right, and understanding, 'Okay, I've got to be at this bus stop by this time, and then I gotta get on this bus, then I gotta transfer to that bus, then I gotta go down to check terminal ticket'—so it's like 2.5 hours for you to get to your doctor's appointment which is scheduled at 9 and you're 17 years-old...probably not. So, the fact that we can drive our clients means that they're getting to the things that they need to, right. They're getting to those housing interviews, they're getting to their doctor, they're getting to Ontario Works, they're coming prepared.*

## Necessary Staff Skills
### *Necessary skills for a Host Homes worker*

Program staff members were asked of the qualities required to be an effective Host Homes worker. Responses ranged from personality traits to knowledge of systems. Personality traits included being personable, approachable, flexible, patient, empathetic, and understanding. A key informant shared:

> *I would say that you [need a] personable approach for sure because, you know, you're meeting people in probably one of the most challenging times of their life. And so, you're going to be met with all kinds of different responses, reactions, and attitudes to their situation, right. So you have to be able to be very personable and human, but in the same, also not take things personally, right. So, yeah, I would say that personality is definitely one of the bigger attributes in that, you know, if you, say, are hard to read, don't communicate very directly with young people, have a hard time presenting yourself as genuine, you're gonna have a really hard time doing this job because connecting and building rapport is going to be really hard.*

*Host Homes workers should also have a good understanding of the various systems young people may be encountering. A key informant discussed the many "hats" they have to wear in the following quote:*

> *My brain has to be full of eligibility criteria, application processes, where*

*what referral forms come from, how to refer to certain programs, what workers are who – to even know what their personalities are and maybe matching for clients. So yeah, you really do need to know the community, and even outside of the community because often we have to look at resources outside of this community, so you have to have a huge knowledge base of what's out there and how to access what's out there.*

## Strengths of the Program

Host providers, young people, and staff members were asked about the elements of the program they liked best. The themes are grouped upon: 1) Perceptions of young people; 2) Perceptions of host providers and program staff.

## Perceptions of Young People
### *A safe place to live*

Young people appreciated that the program provided them with a safe place to live. The Host Homes provided tangible supports, such as meals and a private space of one's own. It also served as an opportunity for young people to focus on attaining their goals since they were in a stable environment. A young person shared:

*when I was living on the streets – when I was couch surfing and shit – I wasn't able to focus on work and all that because I had to focus on where I'm going to sleep, right. Where it's safe, where it's not; how to do shit, you know, and all that.*

### *Host providers*

Two young people stated that their host provider was one of the best things about the program. They felt supported by the hosts, as illustrated by the following quote:

*And [name of host provider] is really supportive; [they're] always helping me out whenever I needed and all that sort of stuff, you know.*

A key informant also shared that the program has been fortunate to have great host providers. The key informant shared that the host providers are meeting the expectations of the program and require minimal supports from program staff.

### Providing hope

The program provided hope for one young person. They stated:

> " *Being able to be with this program and being able to have the relationship that I do with [name of Host Homes worker] is one of the best things to happen to me because it impacts my future and it shows that I can actually do something with myself instead of living on the streets and having nowhere to live.*

## Perceptions of Host Providers & Program Staff
### Making a difference in the community

When thinking of how they benefit from the program, one host provider stated that they felt like they were making a difference. They said:

> " *Just knowing that-that I've helped a little bit for somebody and hopefully they can go on and have a good long, productive life really helps.*

### Resiliency of young people

One host provider recognized the resiliency of young people as the best part of the program. They stated:

> " *The kids themselves. Everyone surprises you. They come in the door, there's no expectations on them, you know. But it just amazes me every time that a new kid moves in, just how quickly they really adapt to the change in their life and, you know, just—yeah. The youth themselves they quickly adopt to their surroundings and moving in. The majority of them working in the program to get themselves back on track, whether it be work or school.*

### Responsiveness of the program

Program staff discussed the responsive nature of the program as a major strength. They stated that problems are immediately addressed and that workers are able to follow through with requests from host providers and young people. This responsiveness was in part due to the program providing cell phones to each Host Homes worker.

The host providers unanimously stated that the program was very responsive to their needs and were rapid in this response. A host provider stated:

> *For me, it's been working pretty well. Anytime you know things are not going as well as we'd like, there's always somebody I can call. It's not like they just leave me and well, we'll get back to you eventually. I-anytime there's any issues with myself or the student, it's dealt with fairly quickly. So yeah I would definitely recommend it to anybody else who would like to be a host home.*

### Shelter diversion

Program staff also noted that the program is effectively diverting young people from the shelter system. Given the limited resources available in Halton Region for young people at-risk of homelessness, the Host Homes program was vital. A program staff member stated:

> *...We can offer housing that's an alternative to emergency shelter across this region. It's a really hard region to serve for people without housing because there is only one shelter serving five cities with 22 beds. So, for us to have youth with an option where they can stay in their communities, stay in their schools, stay connected to family and friends, that's been extremely positive.*

## Challenges with the Program

Program staff, young people, and host providers were asked of any challenges they may have encountered within the Host Homes program. The themes are grouped upon: 1) Perceptions of young people, and 2) Perceptions of host providers and program staff.

## Perceptions of Young People

Young people noted few challenges. One young person felt that there was not much for them to do and that they did not know anyone in their neighbourhood. A different young person felt that some young people in the program lacked motivation and that their space in the program could have been filled by someone who was motivated to change. They shared:

> *Because I know a lot of people in these sort of situations and shit, or who've been through this sort of shit, right. And I hate people who take advantage of shit like this – they don't understand the bigger picture.*

One young person did not feel supported by their host provider. They described the experience of being in the host provider's home as "so-so", seeing that their host provider was not always available.

## Perceptions of Host Providers & Program Staff
### *Size of program*

Several program staff members stated that the program needs more host providers. This includes hosts in a variety of geographic areas (Oakville, Burlington, Milton, Georgetown, Acton). It was thought that there was a particular need in south Halton, as the number of young people requiring assistance from that area are higher. Recruiting more host providers was limited because of funding challenges. Due to funding shifts, Bridging the Gap must fundraise for the per diems offered to host providers. A key informant stated:

> *We have had to fundraise for those per diems. So, in that regard, it's a little precarious to know how exactly this continues, or how many young people we can serve in a year, how many providers—what point do we hit kind of our cap. Because with fundraising, it changes from year to year, it's not like you've been pre-approved for 3 years and you know, okay, I have this many dollars. It's year-to-year, like maybe we'll get this much maybe we'll get that much.*

### *Community attitudes on youth homelessness*

One staff member shared that they saw a challenge in shifting community attitudes on youth homelessness. They stated:

> *It remains challenging to get the community to understand the needs of young people who are without housing in Halton and to understand maybe more what the reasons are behind loss of housing. I feel there's still a really big attitude shift that needs to happen in this community around that NIMBY-ism, you know? Like 'not in my backyard'; 'it's okay if this is a problem but I don't want to do anything about it.' 'Okay, yes there's homeless youth, but it's probably their fault.' ... And despite our continued work in the community or Halton Region, continuing to support efforts like ours, or community events that are organized, it just seems to be—like you can't permeate that attitude. 'Cause I feel like if that attitude shifted that we would have more resources, we would have more providers, we would have more people that would be interested in even temporarily housing youth.*

***Programming (Harm reduction, Participant engagement, Environment)***

Challenges related to the programming itself focused on substance use, participant engagement, and a new environment for young people. One program staff member discussed the challenge of young people are often actively using substances. It was thought that educating host providers on harm reduction is beneficial. The staff member stated:

> *And speaking to the providers honestly and openly, and saying 'okay, yes this is a young person who uses marijuana or drinks alcohol on occasion' but—so that way they know up front that yes, this is a person who uses but they're coming into agree contractually that they're not gonna use within the home or store their drugs or alcohol in the home. And usually once that conversation's been had candidly the provider is maybe less apprehensive because they know now what to look for, but they also know that, you know, this young person is going to be responsible for keeping themselves safe.*

A staff member also shared that engaging younger participants in participation planning is oftentimes more straightforward than engaging older participants. Participation plans are a required part of the program, as young people are expected to be involved in some form of programming (i.e., education, employment). Participants under 18 often list education as the programming they are engaging in. Older participants have greater difficulty in identifying a program and subsequently following through with it. A program staff member shared:

> *The 18 plus … may register in school to kind of meet the agreement that we have but then not attend because it wasn't actually their goal or their outcome to be attending high school.*

One program staff member recognized that the Host Homes environment may be challenging for young people. They stated that it could be a big adjustment for a young person to live in a stranger's home, especially since their homelessness often stems from family conflict. As a result, it was thought that some young people may be reluctant to build a trusting relationship with the host provider.

*Rule breaking*

There were a few challenges discussed by host providers. One provider stated that there were no unhelpful elements of the program and that any challenges could be attributed to the normal behaviour of teenagers. A different provider shared that they experienced some challenges with young people breaking house rules and not attending work or school. The host provider shared:

> " *Cause sometimes, cause a lot of times they don't end up going to school and stuff like that and I'm not their parent, and I don't know what they're schedule is and you know so sometimes they get away with not doing, going to school or going to their jobs that they're supposed to. That's part of the agreement...It's kind of honour-based. They have to uh do it on their own with our help.*

## Advice for Host Providers

When asked what advice they would give for other host providers, the two hosts said to have patience. The hosts shared:

> " *You have to have patience and just you know, gotta be open to whatever life brings you.* (Host 1)
>
> *You need to be very patient and just basically go with the flow because everyday is different.* (Host 2)

The host providers acknowledged that the young people who are part of the program are unique and come from a variety of environments. As a result, getting acquainted with young people can take time. A host provider stated:

> " *But the biggest thing is just to have some patience because they're not gonna open up right away; it might take months for them to actually, you know, wanna talk to you about anything of any importance to them. So, you just have to look out for the clues and then be ready to listen when they're ready to talk.*

## Advice for Other Young People

Young people were asked what advice they would have for other young people in similar circumstances. One young person suggested that they reach out to services, such as Bridging the Gap and the Children's Aid Society. They stated:

> **"** *I know for a fact that Bridging the Gap would be able to help them. And, actually, if there's any situations where anybody doesn't have money, or they don't have somewhere to stay and there's no safe space, you can always call CAS because they're always here to help. And I get paid monthly just for doing things I should be doing in the first place.*

A young people shared that it is important to recognize your own strengths and not to dwell on hardships related to family disconnection. A different young person said that you need to be motivated to change.

## Recommendations

> **"** *Host providers, program staff, and young people provided several suggestions for program improvement. These recommendations focused on: 1) Program expansion and promotion, 2) Additional supports for host providers, and 3) Program operations.*

### Program Expansion & Promotion
***Expansion of program***

*Host providers stated that they would recommend the program to individuals who were considering becoming a host provider. They also thought that the program should be expanded to areas across the country. One host provider said:*

> **"** *I mean Peel is right next door to us, but Peel Region doesn't have any programs like this. I know they do have other kinds of help, but you know, being stuck in a group home with just one person there in the home isn't necessarily a good thing for our kids, either. You know what I'm saying?*

*Key informants also expressed that the Host Homes would benefit from more funding, more staff, and more host providers.*

*Marketing of Program*

Several key informants shared that the program should enhance its marketing strategies to enroll more host providers. A key informant was not aware of current practices, but they shared that it would be important to, "find new ways to promote the program and potentially bring new interested parties forward."

## Additional Supports for Host Providers
*Network for Host Homes Providers*

One key informant thought it would be useful to create a network for Host Homes providers so they could learn from and support each other.

### Engaging Host Homes Providers to Be More Meaningfully
*Engaged with Young People*

One key informant felt that the program could put more effort in engaging host providers in more meaningful ways. Currently, the key informant thought that some host providers could be "hands off" with the young people. They stated:

> *I think I would like to see maybe little more involvement from the Host Home perspective, or like the provider in the youth's life. I think that would go, you know, a long way in helping them be successful. I know some people are kind of hands off so, it's literally like a place to go and put your head down. What I like to see maybe like a little bit more of a family-type environment.*

## Program Operations
*Policies around rule breaking*

*One key informant stated that they would appreciate more clarity around consequences for rule breaking. They labelled this as a "grey area" in the program. They thought that the Host Homes program could set policies around rule breaking, such as what constitutes a verbal warning, a written warning, and discharge from the program.*

*A young person thought the program could implement stricter rules. They thought that some young people take advantage of the program and are not motivated to change. They said:*

" *I feel like the rules should be more strict. Because I feel like people use this, you know, take advantage of it and then not—you get max, like six months or whatever to live here and people just...don't do anything with it. And they don't even get—like there's no penalties, that sort of shit. It's just like, yeah, if you're not gonna—if you're going to choose to do nothing, here you go.*

# Section 7:
# Outcomes Evaluation

This section presents the outcomes of the program. The results are taken from the surveys with young people and the qualitative interviews with young people and host providers.

## Survey Results
### *Host Homes Survey Demographics*

Four young people completed the baseline survey. Below is a breakdown of their demographic characteristics:

- Mean age was 18; age range was 16 to 21 years old

- Equal representation of males and females

- All participants identified as straight/heterosexual

- 50% of participants reported being born outside of Canada, while the other 50% reported being born in Canada

- All participants reported always staying at their host provider's home

One individual was unable to complete the follow-up survey.

### *Housing Scale Ratings*

As demonstrated in the table below, the participants rated their housing as of high quality at both baseline and follow-up. At baseline, the average housing quality rating was 38.5 out of 42. This number slightly dropped at follow-up (36.67 out of 42).

Participants were also asked to rate the impact/effect of their host provider's home and their neighbourhood. At baseline, the participants rated their host provider's home as having a moderately positive impact on them. At follow-up, the participants rated their host provider's home as having a slightly

positive impact on them. Focusing on the impact of their neighbourhoods, participants rated their neighbourhood as having a slightly positive impact at baseline and a moderately positive impact at follow-up.

***Quality of Life***

The participants rated their quality of life as moderately high at both baseline (53.5 out of 63) and follow-up (47.3 out of 63); however, the quality of life ratings slightly decreased at follow-up. Due to missing data, only two participants' scores from baseline are reported.

**Table 1.** Housing Quality, Impact of Housing, Impact of Neighbourhood, Quality of Life.

|  | Time Frame | N Size | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Quality (Toro) | Baseline | 4 | 38.50 | 2.08 |
|  | Follow-up | 3 | 36.67 | 2.08 |
| **Difference in scores** |  |  | -1.83 |  |
| Impact of Host's Home | Baseline | 3 | 6.33 | 0.58 |
|  | Follow-up | 3 | 5.67 | 1.53 |
| **Difference in scores** |  |  | -.66 |  |
| Impact of Neighbourhood | Baseline | 4 | 5.25 | 0.96 |
|  | Follow-up | 3 | 6.33 | 1.16 |
| **Difference in scores** |  |  |  |  |
| Quality of Life | Baseline | 2 | 53.50 | 3.54 |
|  | Follow-up | 3 | 47.29 | 4.21 |
| **Difference in scores** |  |  | -6.21 |  |

## Impact of Neighbourhood

As part of the baseline and follow-up survey, young people were asked about how safe they felt in their neighbourhoods. Seventy-five percent (n=3) of participants at baseline and one hundred percent (n=3) of participants at follow-up reported feeling safe in their neighbourhood. One young person at baseline reported that they "don't know" if they feel safe in their neighbourhood.

At baseline, when asked of the best thing about their neighbourhoods, 75% of participants commented on being nearby to their schools and services, as well as the distance to family and/or friends. At follow-up, participants provided similar responses.

## Impact of Housing on Health

**At baseline, when asked how their current housing situation affected their physical and emotional health, participants shared:**

> *I'm feeling better.* (Young person 1)

**"** *Given I am in a fairly busy part of [city], I enjoy how easy it is to get around to places I need to be. I also live around the corner from a bike path, which motivates me to go out and exercise.* (Young person 2)

**Similar responses were collected from young people at follow-up:**

> *Better than before.* (Young person 1)

**"** *Closer, to school, friends, and services.* (Young person 2)

## Health Care Utilization

The table below outlines the findings on the health care utilization of the Host Homes participants at both baseline and follow-up. It should be noted that at baseline, participants were asked about their health care utilization over the past 12 months, and at follow-up participants were asked to report their health care utilization over the past 3 months.

When young people were asked about visits to a family doctor /general practitioner, at baseline none of the young people had reported accessing this health care service; however, at follow-up, one young person had reported visiting their family doctor/general practitioner in the past three months. The same is also true of visits to any other medical doctor, where at baseline no young person reported any of these visits and one young person reported visiting with any other medical doctor at follow-up. Although the small numbers make it challenging to interpret this finding, it does demonstrate that some young people may be more likely to access health services as a result of engagement in the Host Homes program.

**Table 2.** Health care utilization.

| Pre and Post Results | Time Frame | N | Yes N (%) | No N (%) | I Don't Know/ No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hospital Emergency Room Visit In The Past 12 Months | Baseline | 4 | 1 (25%) | 3 (75%) | 0% |
| | Follow-up | 3 | 1 (33%) | 2 (67%) | 0% |
| Family Doctor / General Practitioner Visit In The Past 12 Months | Baseline | 4 | 0% | 2 (50%) | 2 (50%) |
| | Follow-up | 3 | 1 (33%) | 2 (33%) | 1 (33%) |
| Other Medical Doctors Visit In The Past 12 Months | Baseline | 4 | 0% | 2 (50%) | 2 (50%) |
| | Follow-up | 3 | 1 (33%) | 1 (33%) | 1 (33%) |
| Dentist, Orthodontist, or Dental Hygienist Visit In The Past 12 Months | Baseline | 4 | 1 (25%) | 2 (50%) | 1 (25%) |
| | Follow-up | 3 | 1 (33%) | 2 (67%) | 0% |

# Host Homes Satisfaction

During the follow-up survey, young people were asked to rate their satisfaction with their experiences in the Host Homes program. Overall, the young people appeared to be satisfied with their experiences; however, one young person reported some dissatisfaction with their Host Homes worker and the types of supports received from the program.

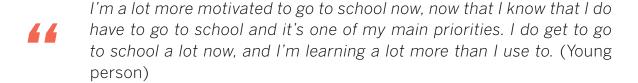**Table 3.** Host Homes Satisfaction Ratings

| (N=3) | Very Satisfied | Quite Satisfied | Slightly Satisfied | Neither Satisfied / dissatisfied | Quite dissatisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall satisfaction with the Host Homes Program | 2 (67%) | 0% | 0% | 1 (33%) | 0% |
| Overall satisfaction with your host's home | 1 (33%) | 1 (33%) | 1 (33%) | 0% | 0% |
| Overall satisfaction with you Host Homes worker | 1 (33%) | 0% | 0% | 1 (33%) | 1 (33%) |
| Overall satisfaction with the types of support you get from the Host Homes Program | 1 (33%) | 0% | 1 (33%) | 0% | 1 (33%) |

## *Qualitative Interviews*

During the qualitative interviews, young people and host providers were asked to speak about the impact of the Host Homes program on certain aspects of the young people's lives.

### *Education*

Of the four young people who completed an interview, two indicated that they were currently in school, one had previously graduated, and one did not specify if they had graduated but indicated that they were not currently in school. As demonstrated by the two quotes below, the Host Homes program helped in their motivation to attend school:

> *I'm a lot more motivated to go to school now, now that I know that I do have to go to school and it's one of my main priorities. I do get to go to school a lot now, and I'm learning a lot more than I use to.* (Young person)

> *I've got two graduated, one from Ryerson, one from Humber; one's in Niagara College right now. One is saving up to go back to school. Yeah, education, you know – the ones that want to get the education, they've, you know, we try to work on a plan to get them either back in school, or on their way to college or university. It it's – if they don't want to go back to high school... -* (Host)

### *Employment*

Some young people reported that the program had an impact on their employment. That said, the majority of young people spoke of wanting to focus other life domains prior to looking for employment. For example, one participant shared that they wanted to focus on school first, whereas another young person stated that they were working on their mental health first.

### *Community Engagement*

Some young people reported that the program had an impact on community engagement, while others did not. As with educational outcomes, young people discussed how the program provided motivation to engage with their community. One young person shared:

> *I feel, once again, I feel a lot more motivated to do things. I actually, I made a plan with myself with [Host Homes worker] about what I wanted to do in the future and all that kind of stuff and I actually want to start going to the gym. And I actually did get a membership a few weeks ago, or a month ago. I haven't been going that much because I'm focused on school, but...I want to start going again once I'm done school.*

One of the hosts shared a story on the engagement of young people in the community. They stated:

> *Well, when the [program] lost the funding...some of the kids have been living here that had been using the facilities of the [program]. It was the kids themselves that, you know, got together and said you know, 'well we really need this service. We need the [program] to stay open.' And they were the ones that set up all the Facebook page and wrote to the mayor and wrote to the region and really pushed for the [program] to stay open. So, you know, they came to realize themselves what help that they needed. So, some of the kids have outgrown the [program] but they're still involved in, you know, the community for kids to come. So yeah, I was really proud of them for doing that.*

### Family

The young people did not report any change or impact in relationships with their family. One of the hosts explained how they have integrated young people within their own family. They stated:

> *That very first youth that moved in was a girl and she's graduated from Ryerson with honors, Bachelor of English major, minor in psychology. I have my granddaughter from her, another one on the way. It's like, yeah. They've become my family, you know. I have five couches and four bedrooms; and holidays, there's a kid on every couch and kids upstairs... We have a toast at family dinners to welcome the new bunch that sit around the table.*

### Friends

Most of the young people reported that the Host Homes program had no impact on their relationships with friends. One young person explained that the program and their friends are separate from one another. Another young person explained that they have met a lot of new people as a result of Host Homes:

> *...I have a friend who lives in the basement actually, of the place that I live and we became good friends and it's good because I don't have that many friends and it's so nearby. So, yeah.*

### Quality of Life

Young people reported on their improved quality of life since participating in the Host Homes program. Young people stated:

> *Oh yeah, of course. I have a house now, I have somewhere to live and that's my quality of life; that's something that I need. So, yeah.* (Young person 1)

> *Yeah it's improved. It's better than a shelter; it's better than the streets, you know. It's in a proper home...* (Young person 2)

Host providers also noticed increases in young people's quality of life, as demonstrated by the following quote:

> *Well hopefully, it's much better. Again, I don't know exactly what happens with some of these students, but some of them have definitely a better quality of life than what they were doing. One of my students, she's gone on to get her own apartment, she has a job, she's doing very well. Now every now and then, I get a phone call from her. So I think it's definitely helping.*

## Goals

Young people were asked what their short and long-terms goals were and what steps they needed to take in order to achieve these goals.

### Short-term goals

Short-term goals focused on educational attainment, recreational activities, and future planning. The quotes below illustrate the short-term goals of the participants.

> *Short term goals is to go to the gym, more or less. I'm finishing my exams; that's one of my goals, I want to pass my exams and I want to make sure that I do good. Getting my job – it's a long and a short-term goal because I want to keep that job, but it's something I want to do right now as soon as possible. And yeah, those are pretty much my short-term goals.* (Young person 1)

> *Oh, it's actually passing high school and actually getting good grades. Like that the – like before this I didn't care at all, but that shit actually matters, right.* (Young person 2)

> *So I want to do something like – I can say dance or something to do in fashion designing.* (Young person 3)

> *Basically just figuring out what's next really.* (Young person 4)

### Long-term Goals

The long-term goals of participants also varied. Some participants shared detailed plans, while others were less descript. Detailed plans often included attending post-secondary education. The quotes from the participants are found below:

> *I haven't exactly thought that far ahead, so.* (Young person 1)

> *Fashion design.* (Young person 2)

> *Long-term I wanna try to get good enough grades so I can actually get into some law program because I want to be a lawyer and shit, right. So, you know. So I wanna try and get to Queens, but I need a good average for that, right. So, you know, that's – yeah, that's basically it, that's my long-term goal.* (Young person 3)

> *Graduate. Find somewhere proper to live, somewhere I can pay rent and actually be safe, knowing that I can stay there for as long as I want as long as I pay. I want to do auto class actually...because I love cars and I actually want to work with cars in the future. So that's one of my long-term goals.* (Young person 4)

### Achieving Goals

After identifying their goals, young people were asked what steps were required to achieve their goals. These steps included being/finding motivation and taking action towards self-improvement. The two quotes below highlight these steps:

" *I need to motivate myself more to actual go and do those goals instead of just sitting in bed all day and watching Netflix. That is my worst thing. I always do that. That's a big problem, but yeah, I do need to motivate myself more to go and actually get those goals done because that's one of my biggest issues.* (Young person 1)

" *I want to do something good, like I want to make my life...Yeah, I want to make myself proud and make my family proud because I'm not with them anymore. So I want to show them that I'm doing good.* (Young person 2).

# Section 8:
# Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from this evaluation demonstrate the positive impact that Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program has on young people. Below we interpret the findings.

## Program Theory

The program is closely following the model of other Host Homes programs. It is providing housing that allows young people to stay in their own communities and is successfully diverting young people from the shelter system. Being able to stay in one's community is particularly important in Halton Region, as the region covers a large geographic area and emergency housing services are often located in areas outside of the young person's own community. The place-based model enables young people to stay close to their schools, places of employment, and families and natural supports, which has been deemed critically important (Gaetz, 2013).

Along with access to safe and secure housing, an essential program element was the support provided by the Host Homes workers. Both of the Host Homes providers and the majority of young people we spoke with felt well supported by their Host Homes worker and were satisfied with this support. The supports were defined as responsive, flexible, and mobile. If host providers had an issue, the Host Homes workers were easily accessible. The supports offered by Host Homes workers are a great strength of the program and should be recognized.

The mobility of services was particularly important for young people, as the program was able to help them access services that would sometimes take hours to get to by public transportation. The program's ability to provide this transportation was deemed as the main adaptation to Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program. This kind of adaptation is common in service delivery within small and mid-size cities (Ecker, Aubry, Cherner, & Jetté, 2015) and therefore an important finding for programs operating in geographically expansive areas, such as Halton Region.

Another important element of the program was the reciprocal supports offered by host providers and young people. Host providers offered formal (i.e., laundry, meal preparation) and informal (i.e., emotional support, social

support) supports to the young people, along with safer accommodations. Looking introspectively, host providers discussed how being involved in the program was gratifying, since they were able to see the growth in young people and maintain positive relationships with young people even after they exited the Host Homes program. Young people also supported their host providers, as they assisted with household tasks and provided emotional supports when appropriate (i.e., listening to their host providers when they needed someone to talk to). This kind of reciprocal support, particularly the informal support, is an important element to capture within the Host Homes model. It demonstrates that the program offers more than just housing. It can create an environment that is mutually beneficial to both host providers and young people.

Bridging the Gap's partnership with the Children's Aid Society had several benefits, but brought forward some important considerations. The partnership resulted in the stability of program operations and access to administrative supports. It also highlighted the complexity of youth homelessness and the systemic challenges many young people face. Key informants noted that there was hesitation from some young people to engage in Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program since it was housed within CAS. This is not surprising since we know that approximately 58% of young people experiencing homelessness in Canada have had some kind of involvement with child protection services (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016). Key informants did explain that once young people were made aware of the independence of the Bridging the Gap program from CAS, many were comfortable with enrolling in the program. This intersection of the child welfare sector and the youth homelessness sector requires further investigation, but it appears that the Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program is adequately and honestly addressing this issue with young people in their program.

Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program did encounter some challenges in relation to its program theory. There were some concerns regarding the profile of young people entering the program. As with other Host Homes programs, the Bridging the Gap program typically worked with young people who were deemed as "low-risk"; however, this risk level could fluctuate, meaning that the program sometimes worked with young people experiencing mental health and substance use challenges. As a result, ambiguity sometimes arose around the application of harm reduction principles in the program and how this relates to rule adherence within the host provider's homes. There were also challenges with engaging older young people in education and employment, and in some young people feeling socially isolated. These kinds of challenges are common within programming targeting young people

and may be best addressed using a common assessment tool and a Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) lens (Gaetz, 2017). The HF4Y model is guided by five core principles:

1. **A right to housing with no preconditions.**

   a. Providing young people with assistance in obtaining safe, secure, and permanent housing that meets their needs as quickly as possible.

2. **Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination.**

   a. Young people are able to make their own decisions about their goals and their futures, what services they receive, and when to start (or end) using services.

3. **Positive youth development and wellness orientation.**

   a. Focusing on individual wellness and building assets, confidence, health, and resilience.

4. **Individualized, client-driven supports with no time limits.**

   a. Recognizing that the needs of young people are unique and that supports should reflect this uniqueness.

5. **Social inclusion and community integration.**

   a. Promoting social inclusion through the fostering of relationships that will enable young people to fully integrate into and participate in their community, in education, and employment.

HF4Y recognizes that young people may require different types of accommodation, including the Host Homes model. The accommodation types are attached to supports that reflect the five core principles above. Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program is currently adopting many of the principles of the HF4Y model. The program could benefit from strengthening current practices related to youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination.

## Program Outcomes

Given the small number of young people and host providers we spoke with, it is challenging to make any definitive claims on the outcomes of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program. That being said, the information shared by the young people and host providers supplied a wealth of data on the impact of the program. Young people were satisfied with the quality of their housing and felt that their housing and neighbourhoods had a positive impact on their lives. Young people stated that their health and wellbeing had improved as a result of being a part of the Host Homes program. These are important finding because young people experiencing homelessness report high symptoms of distress (Gaetz et al., 2016) and we know that improved housing quality leads to improved mental health (Evans, Wells, Chan, & Saltzman, 2000).

Educational and recreational goals were quite common among the young people. Several young people stated that the stability offered by the Host Homes program allowed them to focus on finishing school and engage in recreational activities such as physical fitness and dance. Host providers also noted that young people were achieving their educational goals, as some young people were moving onto college and university. Engaging in educational pursuits is important, as just over half of young people experiencing homelessness report dropping out of school (Gaetz et al., 2016). It is clear that providing a stable housing environment located in a young person's community provides opportunities for young people to achieve their goals.

The young people did not report any changes in the relationship with their families and natural supports. From the literature, we know that familial conflict is a major contributor to youth homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016). We also know that the majority of young people (77%) who experience homelessness would like to improve relationships with their families and many (72%) are in contact with a family member at least once a month (Gaetz et al., 2016). These statistics reflect the importance of working with young people to determine if family reunification efforts are desired by the young person, something that Bridging the Gap should examine in greater detail.

Although the evaluation could not investigate the impact of the demographic characteristics of the participants, several important considerations should be made. Two of the four young people were People of Colour born outside of Canada. Due to the small number of participants, we could not conduct any meaningful analyses on racial identity and if this impacted the experience within the Host Homes environment. We do know that People of Colour are disproportionately represented among young people who experience homelessness and that culturally-appropriate supports are key in service delivery (Gaetz et al., 2016). Furthermore, although all of the participants identified as cisgender and heterosexual, it is important to recognize the unique experiences of LGBTQ2S young people who are homeless. We know that LGBTQ2S young people are disproportionately impacted by youth homelessness and experience exacerbated challenges while homeless (Ecker, 2016). Bridging the Gap has partnerships with local LGBTQ2S agencies, demonstrating their commitment to supporting LGBTQ2S young people. In the time of this evaluation, Bridging the Gap has opened one of their Bridge Houses, a transitional housing program, for LGBTQ2S young people in Halton Region. This type of innovative housing demonstrates Bridging the Gap's commitment to supporting young people that are disproportionately impacted by homelessness.

### *Limitations*

This evaluation has several limitations. Perhaps the most impactful limitation is the small number of young people who participated in the evaluation. With only two host providers being operational during the time of the evaluation, this limited the number of young people available to participate. Therefore, the results from the outcome evaluation should be interpreted with caution. A second limitation is the relatively short follow-up period that was used to assess young people. Given the variable length of stay in the program, we wanted to create a consistent follow-up period so as to capture as many young people as possible while they were still in the program. A longer follow-up period would have demonstrated the lasting impact of the Host Homes program.

# Section 9:
# Recommendations

Based upon the results of the evaluation, we propose several recommendations to enhance existing services in Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program model.

1. **Expand Bridging the Gap's program across Halton Region.**

   The key informants and host providers all called for the expansion of Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program across all of Halton Region and the results from this evaluation support this call. In order for the program to grow, two steps will be required:

   a. Consistent and dedicated funding;
   b. An increase in the number of host providers.

2. **Enhance the marketing strategies for Host Homes recruitment and dedicate resources to recruitment.**

   In order for the program to expand, Bridging the Gap will have to review its current marketing strategies for the recruitment of new Host Homes providers. Point Source Youth released a Host Homes manual that outlines several strategies for host recruitment (Point Source for Youth, 2018). These strategies included:

   a. Distributing flyers at flea markets, coffee shops, social events, festival booths, and community events;
   b. Presenting to different organizations, such as retiree groups, police stations, community events, post-secondary institutions, volunteer organizations, social service agencies, neighbourhood council meetings, faith-based organizations;
   c. Social media (Facebook, Twitter);
   d. Interviews with local media;
   e. Outreach by partners to their supporters and volunteers;
   f. Email blasts.

The Point Source Youth Handbook acknowledges that the recruitment of host providers is challenging and can take time. Recruitment can also take resources and staff time. Therefore, Bridging the Gap should consider developing a volunteer recruitment position. This volunteer could be a community member or a student placement opportunity. Existing host providers could also be tapped to provide testimonials or participate in a limited number of promotional events.

3. **Review Bridging the Gap's intake assessment procedures.**

   Some key informants noted that some young people entering the program were not necessarily low risk. As the Host Homes model is intended for young people who are defined as low risk, Bridging the Gap should review its intake assessment procedures. Tools, such as the Youth Assessment Prioritization (YAP) tool, should be considered.

4. **Review Bridging the Gap's current service delivery model, specifically services targeting family and natural supports, alcohol and substance use, engaging older young people, and community integration.**

   Bridging the Gap's support workers provided flexible and accessible supports to young people and host providers. Young people and host providers felt supported by their workers and were generally satisfied with the services received. Based upon the results of the evaluation, the program should consider a review of services related to:

   a. ***Family and Natural Supports***. Young people did not report any changes in their relationship with their families and/or natural supports. Although this may have been logical in certain situations, the presence of unsafe or unsupportive families may indicate that deeper work is required on the part of support workers to engage in this topic. Examples of family and natural supports programs include Eva's Initiatives' Family Reconnect Program (Eva's Initiatives, 2016). The program works with young people interested in establishing, re-establishing and maintaining supportive relationships with their families. "Family" can mean parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, neighbours, and/or family friends. The program provides services related to the root causes of familial struggles, family breakdown, conflict, communication challenges, substance use, and life and parenting skills.

b.  ***Alcohol and substance use.*** The evaluation did not assess participant's alcohol and substance use, so we cannot comment if the participants were engaging in alcohol or substance use. Some key informants noted that some young people are actively using alcohol or marijuana outside of their host homes, as alcohol and substance use was not permitted in the host home. It will be important for Bridging the Gap to address alcohol and substance use with host providers, particularly as it relates to the agency of young people and harm reduction principles. Some young people may prefer to reside in abstinence-based housing, while others may benefit from housing that focuses on safer use principles.

c.  ***Engaging older young people.*** Some key informants noted that it was challenging to engage older young people in meaningful activities. The program requires participation planning (i.e., engagement in education, employment) for all young people in the program. This requirement should be reviewed, particularly as it relates to the goal planning of older young people (those over the age of 18). The program is doing an excellent job in motivating young people to engage in educational pursuits, so it should consider how it can do the same with young people not wanting to engage in education. This would move the program to operating under a strengths-based approach.

d.  ***Community integration.*** At least one young person reported feelings of social isolation. This is not surprising since young people are placed into a completely new space and adjustment to this space may take time. Bridging the Gap should consider strategies to engage young people in their communities, including highlighting services available in the neighbourhood. The host providers could also play a role in this and are already actively doing so. At least one provider shared how they include young people in family events and have developed lasting relationships with some young people.

5.  ***Further strengthen the Host Homes model within a Housing First for Youth framework.***

Bridging the Gap is currently operating under many of the principles of the Housing First for Youth framework (i.e., immediate placement into housing; goals determined by young people; strengths-based approaches to case management). As outlined in the previous section, Host Homes serve as one of several housing options for young people within the Housing First for Youth framework (Gaetz,

2017). The framework's five guiding principles directly impact the recommendations discussed above (i.e., family and natural supports, choice, harm reduction, and community integration). Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program should consider strengthening their work in relation to youth voice, youth choice, and self-determination and community integration. One way to do this is to review current policies with young people who are currently in the program or who have had experience in the program. By reviewing policies with young people, particularly around substance use, it will move the Host Homes program to even more youth-led programming.

6. **Ensure that culturally appropriate supports are offered to all young people.**

   Although the evaluation did not assess the impact of racial/cultural identity on participation in Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program, it is still important for the program to consider the provision of culturally appropriate supports to young people. If the program does not have capacity to directly offer these services, it should seek out appropriate supports in the community. Related to this, host providers should also be made aware of cultural supports available to young people residing in their home.

7. **Provide more peer support opportunities to host providers.**

   A key informant shared that it may be helpful for host providers to come together to share their experiences and learn from one another. This could take the form of bi-monthly or quarterly opportunities for host providers to come together in-person and develop a sense of camaraderie and support.

8. **Continue to monitor the impact of the program through research and evaluation.**

   This evaluation has highlighted several strengths of the programs and recommendations for program growth. It will be important for Bridging the Gap to continue this work, either through internal evaluation conducted in collaboration with the Children's Aid Society or through external evaluation conducted via a third party. As there is limited evidence on the lasting impact of the Host Homes model, longitudinal follow-ups with young people may be particularly important.

# Section 10:
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