

# HOST HOMES PUBLIC POLICY

The Host Homes initiative is designed to divert youth who are at risk of homelessness from the shelter system. The core client group are youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. These youth are facing homelessness due to a variety of reasons including family conflict, poverty, systems failures, gender identity and sexual orientation. The clients of Host Homes have typically experienced an acute event that has made remaining in the family home untenable. The intervention of Host Homes not only prevents homelessness but also diminishes potentially harmful disruption in the educational and social life of youth.

The youth who are involved in the program have often not had the time to access government services or organize more formal housing arrangements. In addition, without family support, youth often face difficulty navigating the bureaucracy of the social assistance umbrella. Even logistical considerations like access to phone, internet or identity documentation can be an issue for awareness of and accessing social services.

The options for a youth Host Homes recipient include:

- Reuniting with family members to move back into the family home. This is the goal of the program and if it is in the best interest of the youth, there are specific supports aimed at restoring this family. In the UK, 21% of the Host Homes participants moved back into the family home after the program (Insley, 2011).
- Accessing alternative government or organization support models to allow the youth to live in a relatively stable environment.
- Accessing supportive housing models to live independently or with friends.



It is important to highlight that Host Homes is not a foster parent program. Youth who participate in this program have not formally,

or in the eyes of the government, cut ties with their parents or primary care givers. In Ontario, foster care is governed by the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and administered through the Ministry of Youth and Family services. A host may be asked to complete a delegation of guardianship document, this document will give the host temporary authority to make decisions for the child. In most cases, the youth within the program are still involved with their parents and not formally emancipated from their families so this delegation would be a transfer from the parent to the host. This delegation of guardianship does not mean that the host is legally or financially responsible for the youth. It does allow the host to make decisions and sign documents that the youth may need for school, medical services or other situations that may arise.

Since Host Homes is not a formal government program, hosts do not have to undergo a formal process before they welcome youth into their home. Though Host Homes has eligibility requirements, they do not require that those within the program complete the structured analysis family evaluation or the Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) training that is standard for Ontario foster families. Some jurisdictions like Washington have carved out a special legal space where Host

Homes programs are formally exempted from the licencing requirements of traditional foster care while still benefiting from tax exemptions and government funding. Ontario has yet to create this legal framework for Host Homes but with further development of the program there may be additional supports that the government can provide. Since this is not a formal foster care program, the per diem is provided by the not-for-profit organization, as funded by the local municipality, not the provincial government.

There are various government support programs that are in line with Host Homes. These are especially relevant for youth who are approaching adulthood and may not be in a good situation to move back into their family home. It may be the case that a youth is not aware of what they can access and may be limiting the choices they make based on the assumption they will not receive government support. It is also important to note that these applications are often a lengthy process and it is essential that youth have some support navigating these services.

Ontario Works is divided into two types of assistance, employment and financial. In order to qualify for financial assistance, the youth may have to participate in employment programs. Ontario Works also has emergency assistance that may be applicable. The

application and eligibility process for Ontario Works is much more broadly available and the application process is more rapid than other supports like ODSP or OSAP.

Included in the Ontario Works benefits are additional services apart from financial assistance and employment support. Those eligible for Ontario Works may also be eligible for prescription drug and dental coverage and moving costs. Ontario Works is usually only available for applicants who are over the age of 18, however this age can be lowered when “the Administrator is satisfied that special circumstances exist requiring the applicant to live outside the parental home”<sup>1</sup>. In principle, Ontario Works does not pay out money to youth under the age of 18. There are four reasons that exceptions are made for those under 18, Irreconcilable Differences and Clearly Demonstrated Withdrawal of Parental Support, Parent’s Inability to Provide Adequate Care and Support, Physical, Emotional or Sexual Abuse and No Familial Home or Financial Support Available Through No Fault of the Applicant. Though some of these factors may be valid, it is important that the youth drives this process, especially because some of the appeals that the youth may need to make in order to qualify for

assistance could also raise red flags to child protective services.

## ODSP

To receive income support from the Ontario Disability Support Program, a youth must be a person with a disability as defined by under the ODSP Act (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2018). This disability covers both mental and physical impairment. They provide more detail, specifically that a “person with a disability is a person with a substantial physical or mental impairment that is continuous or recurrent and is expected to last a year or more.” The screening process can be onerous, and this often discourages individuals from applying.

## OSAP

Ontario Student Assistant Program consists of a series grants and bursaries that can help to pay for secondary education. Over the last few years, these programs have become much more generous and now the funding available is enough to significantly subsidize both living and university costs. There is a simple calculator on the government website that can help to assess the possible OSAP funding. OSAP must be applied for annually

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/social/directives/ow/3\\_5\\_OW\\_Directives.aspx](https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/social/directives/ow/3_5_OW_Directives.aspx)

and there are additional documents such as social assurance number and parental tax forms that a youth are required to provide in order to complete their eligibility assessment. If the youth no longer has contact with their family, they can apply for OSAP, stating that a serious and permanent family breakdown has occurred that prevents the applicant from accessing this information or parental support.

## HOUSING AND TENDENCY ACT

This is an option for youth to find their own housing or live communally with friends.

Young people can legally sign a lease at age 16 or 17. Depending on the availability of housing in their desired location, many youth face discriminations competing in the already competitive Ontario housing market. To illustrate this point, roughly a quarter of renter households spend more than 50% of their income on housing (Harris, 2018). Being able to get a co-signer to take some responsibility of the lease will significantly increase their chances of getting housed.

*written by Robyn Jones.*

## References

Harris, T., (2018, May 8) 'Crisis of affordability' for Toronto renters, report says. **The Toronto Star**. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/05/08/crisis-of-affordability-for-toronto-renters-report-says.html>

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