

Bridging the Gap and Raising the Roof's Host Homes Program Model

Bridging the Gap provides readily and easily accessible support for youth at risk of/ experiencing homelessness between the ages of 16 to 24 residing in Halton Region. Bridging the Gap is committed to fostering a youth-directed, strength-based approach to assisting youth in achieving their goals.

Bridging the Gap recognizes homelessness includes a variety of different living situations such as:

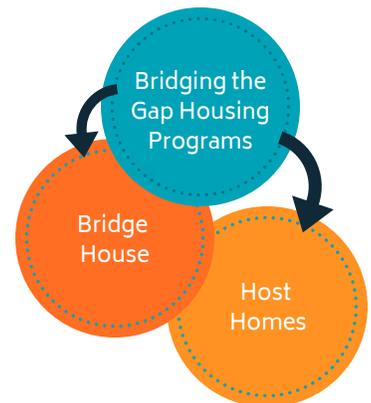
- Couch surfing
- Camping out
- Nowhere to go that night
- Kicked out
- Support youth exiting from systems (ie.:child protection, health care, legal)



Bridging the Gap provides:



They meet youth in their community and work with youth to provide personalized supports.



The Bridge House and Host Homes are Bridging the Gap's housing programs.

The Bridge House is a transitional housing program in which residents receive off-site staff support with learning essential life skills and achieving their personal goals, during the two-year stay. Residents in this program are responsible for a monthly program fee equivalent to their Ontario shelter allowance which includes utilities, cable, internet, furnishings, and cleaning supplies. Youth must be committed to 30 hours per week participation plan, which can be a combination of school, work, volunteering and/or counselling.

HOST HOMES



The Host Homes Program is an alternative to emergency shelters and transitional housing services for youth at risk of becoming homeless. Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program is located in each major community of Halton (Burlington, Oakville, Milton, Georgetown & Acton). It is an excellent example of place-based youth homelessness prevention. Located in the youth's community, it provides an opportunity for community members to get involved in solutions to youth homelessness.

Young people in the program who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, are provided with a private and safe place to stay, including: a **warm bed**, access to **home amenities**, two meals daily (breakfast and dinner), and a **host with a listening ear**. Youth generally stay at a host home for 6 months to a year.

Combined with a family reunification strategy (when it is safe to do so), the program gives youth and their family **the ability to take a break and resolve conflict**, which can strengthen families and potentially shorten the length of time young people experience homelessness (Gaetz, 2013).

Additionally, a **Host Home can ease the transition to independent living**, reduce isolation, and prevent entrance into the homelessness system for youth leaving care (Gaetz, 2013).

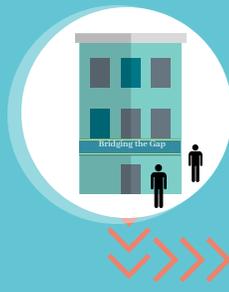
Rather than getting 'placed' into homes, youth have the flexibility to work with the community agency to **choose which host family best suits them**, or they can **nominate potential hosts** from previous existing supportive relationships (Gaetz, 2013; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

HOST HOMES

aims to divert youth from shelters. By connecting a youth with a host family, we maintain the youth's connection to their community and support systems. The youth works with a support worker to find long-term housing that meets their needs.

1. YOUTH SEEK HELP

Young people in need of housing support reach out to a Youth-Serving Agency in their community.



3. PERSONALIZED SUPPORT

The agency supports the youth to meet their health, education, and employment goals.



2. CREATING A MATCH

The Agency matches each young person with a host family to meet their basic needs.



4. TRANSITION

When safe to do so, youth are reconnected to their family or transition to permanent affordable housing.



IMPACTS FOR YOUTH



Currently, young people who are homeless (age 13-24) make up approximately 20% of the homeless population in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2014).



Additionally, Gaetz and colleagues (2016) found that **nearly 60% (57.8%) of homeless youth have had some prior involvement with child protection service in the past** (e.g.: foster care, group home placements, or youth custodial centers).

Transitions from systems of care are of concern in the efforts to address youth homelessness. **Some youth may choose to leave because of bad experiences or inadequate support in group homes or foster care** (Gaetz et al., 2016). Other times, youth simply "age out" of the foster care system and are left to fend for themselves. Often, these individuals are lacking the necessary resources and preparation for living independently at such a young age (Gaetz et al., 2016).



Youth in the Host Homes Program have the opportunity to live in a safe and comfortable home with an approved host while working on reaching personal goals relating to education and employment. Young people are able to maintain a connection to their community and focus on these goals with the support of a Youth Worker from Bridging the Gap. Since the Host Homes living situation relieves the stress of meeting basic needs and provides wraparound services, young people are able to focus on what is important to them and transition to more stable housing.



ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

HOST

- provide a safe place;
- a private room;
- a bed;
- a listening ear, and
- two meals a day.

YOUTH

- 30 hour/week in a community participation plan (combination of school, work, volunteering and/or counselling);
- This expectation of the young people is designed to encourage their journey in achieving goals and becoming self-sufficient.

SERVICE PROVIDER

- Screening Host;
- Assessing Youth;
- Matching Youth with hosts;
- Mediating issues that arise;
- Providing wrap-around youth-focused services (e.g.: assistance with appointments, interview, job searching, or counselling).



Due to Bridging the Gap's unique position of being housed in a chapter of Halton Children's Aid Society, the importance of this organization's role in the Host Homes program has been brought to light.

The Children's Aid Society is responsible for connecting youth in their care to the services **Bridging the Gap** can provide, supporting youth they work with while youth are in the host homes program, and sharing resources to screen hosts.



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RESEARCH & EVALUATION

PROGRAM EVALUATION



Raising the Roof, in partnership with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, can develop a knowledge base and materials to disseminate information by researching existing host homes programs and evaluating long standing models like Bridging the Gap's in Halton, Ontario. A fulsome program evaluation will better equip Bridging the Gap with the information required to appropriately tailor programming to meet the needs of their community. It will also help to demonstrate Host Homes as an important alternative solution to ease youth's transition from leaving home or the care of protection services.



By gaining a better understanding of the needs of the youth and prospective Hosts, service providers will be able to make important decisions about how to implement this program in their own community and thus provide a safe alternative to the emergency shelter system.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

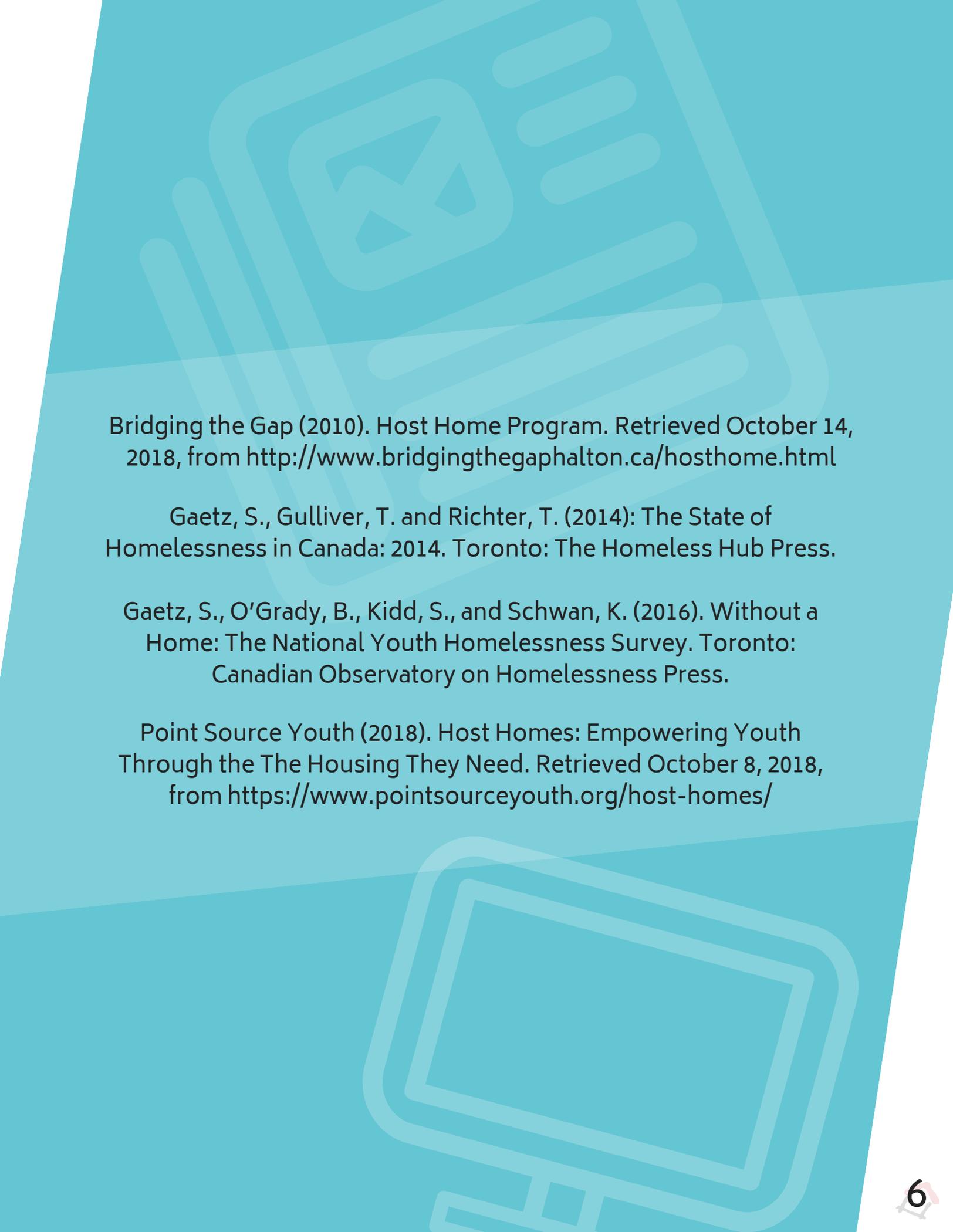
The development of a toolkit with information from existing programs can help Raising the Roof position itself with the knowledge of Host Homes program implementation, and to better assist interested community agencies with the organization and design of new Host Homes programs.

This toolkit contains information such as where existing Host Homes programs are housed, the ways in which these programs are run, a guideline for an ideal Host Homes program, and sample documents from current programs. This will assist new programs with knowing where to start, whom to contact to depending on how they want to implement the program, and knowledge that Raising the Roof can support with an evaluation of the program.



ADAPTATION TO CANADIAN CONTEXT

Point Source Youth, an organization in the US, has supported with the development of various Host Homes Programs. Currently there are more than 12 Host Homes programs in the US and Point Source Youth has partnered with service providers to develop at least half of them. Raising the Roof intends to follow the lead of Point Source Youth in Canada through the development of Host Homes Programs in 8 communities by 2020.

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Bridging the Gap (2010). Host Home Program. Retrieved October 14, 2018, from <http://www.bridgingthegaphalton.ca/hosthome.html>

Gaetz, S., Gulliver, T. and Richter, T. (2014): The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Kidd, S., and Schwan, K. (2016). Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Point Source Youth (2018). Host Homes: Empowering Youth Through the The Housing They Need. Retrieved October 8, 2018, from <https://www.pointsourceyouth.org/host-homes/>