

# Host Homes within a Housing First for Youth Model

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rights-based intervention for young people (aged 13-24) who experience homelessness, or who are at risk (Gaetz, 2017). This model is adapted from the well-established Housing First approach to addressing homelessness. The goal is to provide housing and supports for young people in order to create a healthy transition to adulthood. HF4Y addresses the needs of young people by providing them with:

- Immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable and appropriate;
- Age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment, and social inclusion.

Host Homes, as a shelter-diversion program, fits into the HF4Y model as seen through the 5 core HF4Y principles.



## HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES

## HOST HOMES

### Right to Housing with No Preconditions

- No preconditions: removing the barrier of asking people to be “ready for housing” stems from a harm reduction philosophy. This also allows youth the choice of abstinence only housing or housing which follows a harm reduction approach (Gaetz, 2017).
- Supports are offered outside of the home; in order to ensure that housing is not contingent on a youth’s participation in support services (Gaetz, 2017).
- Though a precondition of the Host Homes program is that young people must be considered “low-acuity”; this is for the safety of both youth and hosts.
- Hosts may not be equipped with the skills and boundaries to support young people in need of intensive supports.
- Some supports are offered in the home. The property is not owned by the community organization
- Programming and case management do not take place in the home



## Youth Choice, Youth Voice, and Self-Determination

- Young people should be supported in making choices and have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes safely. With that in mind, HF4Y programs have two conditions:
    - Young people must agree to weekly visits or contact with a caseworker (Gaetz, 2017).
    - If young people have an income source, they are expected to contribute up to 30% to the cost of rent (Gaetz, 2017).
  - Putting choice into action: Case workers work with young people in a supportive and strengths-based way to identify assets and challenges, and to develop and actualize clients' identified goals. Young people make choices about the location and type of housing they receive (Gaetz, 2017).
- Young people who stay in Host Homes programs meet with a case worker regularly (once a week or more when the young person asks for support) as they work towards the goals of the young person together.
  - Host Homes programs vary in expectations of the young person's financial contributions. In some cases, young people in Host Homes programs are expected to pay rent and in other cases, community organizations provide a per diem as housing compensation to the Host. The per diem varies based on who funds the program. Young people are also expected to contribute in non-financial ways such as maintaining a clean and tidy shared space. In programs where young people are expected to pay rent, the agreed upon value is expected to be less than 30% of their income to ensure affordability.
  - Part of the regular meetings with case workers consist of goal development for the young person. Case workers support youth with their goals in a strengths-based way to help young people identify their strengths and support with the development of skills. Regularly, case works help young people with family reunification, attaining employment, continuing education, or health-based needs
  - Hosts may also help support young people in learning life skills like cooking, laundry, or demonstrating healthy family dynamics
  - Young people are provided the choice of entering a Host Home as one of the programs available to them. In addition to choosing to take part in the program, they are provided with opportunity to choose whether they like the person

## Positive Youth Development and Wellness Orientation

- Gaetz (2017) notes that a positive youth development approach:
  - Identifies the youth's personal strengths in order to build self-esteem and a positive sense of self
  - Works to improve the youth's communication and problem-solving skills
  - Enhances and builds natural supports, including family relationships
  - Assists the youth in personal goal setting
  - Helps the youth to access educational opportunities and identify personal interests
- Trauma-informed care: This involves the organizational implementation of principles, policies and procedures to prevent from re-traumatizing service users when working with them (Gaetz, 2017).
- The focus of HF4Y, is to help youth with a healthy transition into adulthood in addition to independent living which can be done by acknowledging the trauma young people may have experienced and foster an environment that focuses on enhancing physical and emotional wellness, and addressing personal safety (Gaetz, 2017).

- Host Homes is a program that provides constant support for young people. Though Hosts may not be able to perform case management, they can provide a listening ear or some positive reinforcement to help young people build self-esteem.
- By virtue of having to live with other people, youth are constantly practicing communication and problem-solving. Youth and hosts are expected to attempt to mediate conflict among themselves before asking case workers for support
- Case workers assist young people in this program with their educational, employment, health, and independent living goals. In Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program, youth are expected to engage in the community, but youth dictate what that means to them. Going to their part time job, going to school, or engaging in counselling are examples of ways in which young people can engage in the community.
- Case workers and Hosts are provided training for trauma informed care. In addition to the training, Hosts are educated on the many ways in which a young person can enter homelessness





## Individualized, Client-Driven Supports with No Time Limit

- Active engagement without coercion (Gaetz, 2017).
- Case management must be assertive though not aggressive with the following aspects to consider (Gaetz, 2017):
  - Supports must have flexible time frames that are appropriate for young people
  - Supports must be adaptable to the changing needs of young people
  - Knowledge that what the worker wants for the youth is not necessarily what the youth wants for themselves
  - Knowledge that trust takes time to build
  - Encourage young people to focus on positive and learn from mistakes
- Many Host Homes programs provide a given length of stay, however they do take the specific needs of each young person into consideration. Young people in the Host Homes program may be moved to less supportive housing options like a supportive roommate model, or individual housing as they exit Host Homes.
- Exits from Host Homes generally happen when the young person is ready to leave and when there is a next step in place.
- As the case management aspect of Host Homes is person-centered, the programs and services provided are adapted as the needs of the young person change.
- Knowing that trusting relationships are important, Hosts are only expected to report back to the case manager when there is a concern for someone's safety and youth are made aware of this so they can feel comfortable confiding in Hosts if they would like to.



## Social Inclusion and Community Integration

- Gaetz (2017) lists key areas of inclusion:
  - Housing models that do not stigmatize or isolate clients.
  - Opportunities for social and cultural engagement in order to develop positive social relationships and enhance social inclusion, particularly for Indigenous, racialized, LGBTQ2S, newcomer youth, and other subpopulations that may experience enhanced social isolation or exclusion.
  - Building natural supports
  - Opportunities for engagement in meaningful activities through education, employment, vocational and recreational activities.
  - Connections to relevant professional supports such as a doctor, therapist, social worker, etc.
- Host Homes does not stigmatize or isolate clients as youth are matched with a Host or Host family that they feel comfortable with.
- Opportunities for social and cultural engagement vary based on the Host Homes program. Some Host Homes programs are particularly geared toward LGBTQ2S youth and have staff and hosts that are part of this community.
- One key component of Host Homes is family reunification. As a young person stays in a Host Home, they work with their case worker to see if reunifying with family is a safe option. In this case family can mean a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or even close friend if moving back in with parents is not an option.
- Youth in Host Homes are working toward their own goals, but youth are encouraged to choose goals that relate to education, employment, and training.
- Wrap-around services provided by Host Homes programs include access to counselling, health care, and anything else the young person may need.

## References

Gaetz, Stephen. (2017). *THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

