

SUMMARY REPORT

Needs Analysis of Homeless and At-Risk Youth in the Nipissing District

Submitted To:

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1.0 Background & Purpose

The Nipissing Homelessness Partnership (NHP) has identified that youths aged 16 and 17 who are unable to live with their parents/guardians are increasingly vulnerable to becoming homeless due to an insufficient supply of affordable rental housing in North Bay and surrounding District. The demand for rental housing is expected to increase before new housing is developed and this will continue to put increased pressure on this marginalized population. Furthermore, this youth population faces a number of additional challenges and service requirements due to mental health and addiction problems, exposure to abuse and family violence, lack of employment opportunities and/or having been in conflict with the law.

Consequently, in the Spring of 2008 it was determined by the NHP that a thorough analysis of the needs of homeless and at-risk youth should be undertaken to identify gaps in service and to develop an action plan to create transitional housing and support services for this target population. To this end, the firm of Summit Consulting was retained in July 2008 to formally commence work on completing this needs assessment project.

2.0 Project Methodology

Project Methodology

At the outset of the project the consultant met with Bob Barraclough, Director, Operations and Client Services with the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB) to receive background information and clarify the scope and objectives of the project. Based on this dialogue, a preliminary workplan was established for the project in July 2008 which included the following workplan activities:

❖ Project Orientation

Consultant met with NHP to receive thorough project orientation, confirm scope and expectations, and finalize project workplan. The consultant also met regularly with the NHP throughout the duration of the assignment.

❖ Literature Review

The consultant was provided with and reviewed relevant documentation associated with the project which included some of the following: Nipissing District Housing Needs, Supply & Affordability Study (2008), the Homelessness Partnering Strategy – Community Plan (Framework and Data Tools), Statistics Canada Census Data 2006 as well as copies of meeting minutes from the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership.

❖ Development of Interview and Survey Tools

The consultant then developed interview questionnaires to elicit feedback from agency staff representatives (provider stakeholders) and at-risk youth in the community. These questions were reviewed and approved by the NHP and the consultant was also provided

with a list of stakeholders to be interviewed. Copies of these interview/survey questions are included in **Appendix A**.

❖ *Stakeholder Consultation Process*

The next stage of the assignment involved an extensive stakeholder consultation process being undertaken with local service providers and at-risk youth to obtain feedback and commentary on the issue of youth homelessness in the community. This consultation included face-to-face and telephone interviews with (21) agency representatives as well as 9 youth who participated in a structured focus group. A list of stakeholders interviewed during the project is included in **Appendix B**.

❖ *Consolidating Feedback*

Once the stakeholder consultation process and collection of feedback was completed a thorough analysis of this information was undertaken. As part of this analysis, core themes and critical gaps in services were identified which were subsequently reviewed and refined in consultation with the NHP. Based on this data, a number of recommendations and priorities for action were identified by the consultant and a final list of summary recommendations was endorsed by the NHP.

❖ *Preparing Summary Report*

The final component of the project included the submission of a detailed summary report to the NHP which included key findings and observations as well as recommendations for implementing strategies to address the issue of youth homelessness in North Bay & area in the next 12-18 months.

3.0 Quantifying Youth Homelessness

As there is no standardized intake process with common definitions for this target population and few agencies have a direct mandate to serve homeless youth – obtaining an accurate number (quantifying) the extent of this client population is difficult. This population is not highly visible but local providers who work with youth express that a number of youth are “couch surfing” due to homelessness and/or difficult family situations. Consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions, it also appears that the largest proportion of this homeless youth population tends to gravitate towards the urban centre of North Bay.

While determining the exact number of homeless youth is challenging it can be estimated that North Bay and area has a youth homeless population which ranges between 200-300 individuals annually. This estimate is based on data provided by community providers which includes some of the following information:

- Crisis Centre North Bay serves approximately 200 people (under 21 years of age) annually;
- DNSSAB – see about 10-15 youth (including transients) on a monthly basis;

- Low Income People's Involvement (LIPI) serves 1500 families with shelter needs on an annual basis of which approximately 25% include youth. This means that approximately 380 youth are served each year by the organization;
- The Gathering Place (soup kitchen) has served 110,000 meals over the past 5 years;
- People for Equal Partnership in Mental Health (PEP – identified that 12-15 members are at risk of becoming homeless each month and estimate that they serve between 30-35 homeless or at-risk youth on an annual basis;
- The Children's Aid Society estimates that they serve 10-12 homeless youth on an annual basis.

The total youth population (aged 15-24) in the entire Nipissing District as of the 2006 Census is 11,635. It should be noted that this youth population declined by 18% between 1986 and 2001 – but that this declining trend has been reversed with a 4.5% increase between 2001 and 2006. Consequently, it can be estimated that the overall homelessness rate throughout the Nipissing District for this youth population ranges between 2% to 3%.

* It should be noted for the purposes of this study that the age category for youth is based on Human Resources Canada delineation of individuals who are between 15-24 years of age.

4.0 Housing & Emergency Shelter – Facts & Figures

The majority of youth who find themselves at-risk of becoming homeless are in this situation due to difficult family lives, having experienced physical/sexual abuse, or who are in conflict with parents who are abusive and/or have mental health/addiction problems. Others have drug and alcohol addictions, behavioural issues or have been in custody due to conflicts with the law. When youth make the decision to leave their home or find themselves without shelter they have limited options. They often choose to live with friends and family for short-periods of time (couch surfing) or they can seek emergency shelter through Crisis Centre North Bay or other shelter provider.

In terms of permanent housing however, there are few opportunities available for the homeless and at-risk youth population to secure safe and adequate living accommodations in North Bay and surrounding communities. This is especially true in the larger urban centre of North Bay where there is a critical shortage of affordable housing and a rental vacancy rate of less than 1% (summer 2009). This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that there are lengthy waiting lists for subsidized (public housing), no transitional housing and an unwillingness of landlords to rent their units to youth and/or marginalized populations. Furthermore, for youth who are not yet 18 years old, there is considerable difficulty accessing social assistance without the support of a designated trustee which further limits the capacity of this group to acquire the financial resources necessary to pay rent.

To obtain a better understanding of this housing challenge it is useful to examine local housing supply and demand as well as the spectrum of shelter supports available for the youth population. In this regard, the **Nipissing District Housing Needs, Supply & Affordability Study (2008)** provides some very useful data which describes the availability of housing options as well as socio-demographic characteristics which directly impact youth homelessness. Key elements of this data are highlighted in the sections below.

Income, Education and Employment Levels - Key Facts:

- The number of Nipissing District residents living below the low-income cut-off (LICO) has not changed over a 20-year period. Approximately 15% of the District's families and 45% of singles are living below the low-income cut-off;
- Approximately 6% of Nipissing District's population is on social assistance (5,300 people) – almost twice the provincial average and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) caseload is currently the highest in Ontario and has been for the past 5 years;
- This large caseload represents a relatively high need for affordable housing;
- Approximately 2,000 of the District's children (12% of the population ages 17 and under) are social assistance dependents – 50% higher than the provincial rate. This population segment will require adequate, stable housing to reduce risk for health and well-being.
- While gains have been made in the overall level of education achieved within the District, there has not been a significant change in those without a high school education – 23% of the population aged 20-64 does not have a High School Diploma.
- Unemployment and participation levels are the same as they were 20 years ago and are significantly below the provincial average.

Current Housing Supply & Gaps – Key Facts:

- There is a need for 16 more shelter beds to serve the youth population ages 16-24 in North Bay and West Nipissing (Futures Residential Program);
- There is a need for transitional housing for youth (Nipissing District does not have any “bricks and mortar” transitional housing);
- There are 143 people waiting for Supportive/Supported Housing, Group Homes and Family Homes;
- As of December 2007, there were approximately 1,325 people on the waiting list for social housing – this waiting list has increased by 19.5% over the past 2 years;
- Nipissing District's aboriginal population is growing faster than the non-aboriginal population and is also much younger. In fact, 17.2% of the District's aboriginal population is between the ages of 15-24 while the non-aboriginal youth population is 13.7%. Approximately 72% of the aboriginal population resides in the District's urban centres (North Bay 47.5%, West Nipissing 19% and Mattawa 5.5%) which will have significant implications on future housing and support programs for this population;
- Currently North Bay has one of the lowest vacancy rates in Ontario. Its average apartment vacancy rate is 1.1% and means there is a shortage of approximately 60 apartments in the City;

- The number of Nipissing District residents in need of affordable housing has increased by 65% since 1981;
- Since 2004, the average rent in North Bay has increased by 8% or \$52;
- Student enrollment at Nipissing University has nearly doubled since 2000 – this is putting excessive pressure on North Bay’s rental market.

Emergency Shelter – Key Facts:

- The Nipissing District has a total of 66 emergency shelter beds for the homeless population including men, women, families and children. There are no youth-specific hostels in the District and a large proportion shelter beds are focused on addressing the needs of women and families who are dealing with domestic violence. The following table provides an overview of these beds and who they are designated for.

Table 1 – Emergency Shelters – Nipissing District

<i>SHELTER</i>	<i>BEDS</i>	<i>CLIENTS SERVED</i>
<i>Mattawa Family Resource Centre</i>	10	Females
<i>Nipissing Transition House</i>	13	Females
<i>Crisis Centre North Bay</i>	19	Co-ed, singles and families
<i>Ojibway Family Resource Centre</i>	10	Native and non-Native women and children
<i>Salvation Army</i>	4	Co-ed singles
<i>Sturgeon Falls Family Resource Centre</i>	10	Females
	66	

- The average length of stay in emergency shelters within Nipissing District has increased by 21% since 2003;
- There has also been an overall increase in the utilization of emergency shelters since 2003 with local shelters being full or beyond capacity (38% increase);
- The Nipissing Transition House is a 13-bed facility with 21 people staying there. Whereas the average length of stay used to be 6 weeks, it is now 3 months due to the lack of affordable housing in the community ;
- Crisis Centre North Bay often runs at 80% capacity but recently has been exceeding its capacity by as many as 6 or more individuals;

- During the third quarter of 2007 the Ojibway Family Resource Centre was unable to serve 149 women;
- Approximately 41 individuals were waiting for emergency shelter in the third quarter of 2007;
- The Mattawa Family Resource Centre permits a stay of 6 weeks. It notes however, that for women who come into the shelter for housing reasons (as opposed to crisis or domestic violence reasons) the stay is longer;
- Crisis Centre North Bay **indicates that it could double its present capacity of 10 beds in the Futures Residential Program;**
- The **Sturgeon Falls Family Resource Centre indicates that it also needs a 6-10 bed residential program for youth** – similar to Crisis Centre North Bay’s Futures Program.

5.0 Inventory of Programs & Services for Homeless & At-Risk Youth

Although very few agencies within North Bay and surrounding communities have a direct mandate to serve homeless youth, there are a number of service organizations involved in meeting the needs of this target population. Some of the programs and services available to homeless and at-risk youth within the catchment area are outlined below.

Emergency Shelter

Crisis Centre North Bay	Serving co-ed, singles & families
Mattawa Family Resource Centre	Serving Females
Nipissing Transition House	Serving Females
Sturgeon Falls Family Resource Centre	Serving Females
Ojibway Family Resource Centre	Native and Non-Native women, children

Financial Support

DNSSAB	Ontario Works (Social Assistance)
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Housing

Nipissing District Housing Corporation	Affordable rental housing
Nipissing Mental Health & Community Housing	Housing Registry & support
Low Income People’s Involvement (LIPI)	Housing in Trusteeship Program
Crisis Centre North Bay	Futures Residential Program & Community Transition Worker

Child Protection

Nipissing & Parry Sound Children’s Aid Society
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Food, Safety & Support

The Gathering Place Soup Kitchen
North Bay Food Bank

North Bay Police Service
Salvation Army

Mental Health

Hands (formerly Algonquin Child & Family Services) - counseling
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – counseling & housing support
North Bay General Hospital – Crisis Intervention

Addictions

* Adult detox program only in North Bay.
Intensive residential treatment program for youth only available in Thunder Bay.

Corrections

Youth Justice Services (Probation & Parole)

Educational Support

High School Alternative Education Programs (*Chippewa)
Classroom for Crown Wards (via partnership with Children’s Aid Society and Near
North District School Board)

Employment & Training

DEOC – Employment Resource Centre
YES Employment Services
Canadore College

6.0 Consultation with Providers – Key Findings

The next stage in the data collection process involved an extensive consultation process with local service providers who are involved in serving homeless and at-risk youth in North Bay and surrounding communities. To this end, a total of 21 service providers participated in face-to-face and telephone interviews and provided valuable feedback reflecting their unique experience and agency perspectives in serving this target population. Accordingly, stakeholder providers were asked a series of questions and a summary of their collective feedback is outlined below.

Question:

In your opinion, is youth homelessness a serious issue in North Bay and area communities?

Feedback received from Providers:

- More than 90% of stakeholders consulted identified that they felt youth homelessness was a serious issue in their community.
- “Yes it is. The rents have gone up so much in our area that it doesn’t reflect their low salaries or OW amount so they have a hard time finding affordable housing. Their

age is also a barrier because a lot of landlords refuse to rent to young adults and this population often lacks the skills to speak with and/or negotiate with landlords.”

- “Yes. From my experience at the Crisis Centre we saw lots of kids between 16-20 who were couch surfing and we also knew that a great number of hidden youth existed (kids that stay at friends, are not on the street)”
- Yes, but the youth are more hidden compared to adults, they are somewhere couch surfing, not a home and probably not in a safe place. North Bay has many agencies with different mandates, many youth slip between the cracks.

Question:

How are you funded – and what funding amounts are specifically allocated to serve homeless youth?

Feedback received from Providers:

- In discussions with service providers it appears that apart from existing budgets in the Crisis Centre, there are few other service organizations which have designated budgets to serve the needs of the youth homeless population.
- Children’s mental health, child protection, education and youth justice sectors – are all involved in meeting the needs of youth at-risk through the provision of their specific mandated services – but this funding is not targeted to the provision of homelessness services.
- The majority of homelessness program funding comes through the Federal government through 2-Year funding initiatives – and program funding is not continuous from year-to-year – which makes planning and coordinating homeless services very challenging.

Question:

In your opinion, what would you identify as the critical gaps in service for the homeless and at-risk youth population in the community?

Feedback received from Providers:

Access to Financial Support:

- Requirement for 16-18 year olds to have a trustee to apply for Ontario Works assistance greatly limits access to financial resources to access housing in the community. “Youth are caught because they do not have a solution to their shelter dilemma... they can’t get money because they are not adults – but they are deemed old enough to be on the streets.”

- If a 16 yr old is abused by a/or both parents, they still need a trustee through Ontario Works and they cannot get an apartment - so they have to find room and board (in Sturgeon Falls we have found one room in board advertised in the past 5 years)
- There is a considerable need for under 18 Trusteeship

Housing / Shelter:

- Lack of transitional housing
- Lack of safe beds
- Lack of affordable housing
- Community requires a physical shelter (hostel) to house and care for youth in need. This shelter could provide counseling services and life skills support and serve as a street-level information/referral clearinghouse for at-risk youth.
- Smaller communities surrounding North Bay do not have designated shelters or dedicated support services for homeless youth

Access to Support Services:

- There are no street-level or outreach workers in Nipissing to help homeless or at-risk youth.
- Lack of local addiction services (need for more intensive residential treatment programs for drug/alcohol abuse)
- Lack of readily available mental health counseling for youth in crisis (long wait lists)
- Lack of social supports, recreation opportunities and life skills training for youth
- Lack of dedicated drop-in centre for homeless or at-risk youth (beyond soup kitchen and small number of school-based and agency programs) makes it difficult to identify homeless youth and/or address their needs. This keeps the youth homeless population “invisible”.
- Youth with serious mental illness or in conflict with the law are very difficult to serve. They are often denied housing and have difficulty accessing available programs as eligibility criteria for service delivery and/or service provider capacity requirements cannot be met.
- Appears to be a lack of coordinated proactive planning to support youth coming out of detention/custody and reintegrating/transitioning to the community.

- Funding is available for one-time projects and programming however, the lack of stable funding for continuous programming for the local homeless population is an on-going challenge for service providers.

Employment & Education Programs:

- Job skills training – need money to access training programs (especially skilled trades)
- Youth having to stay in school until 18 does not fit well with all kids. “There are not a lot of alternatives for youth who are not academically inclined.”
- There is a need for more flexible and targeted alternative education and employment training programs for the at-risk youth population in Nipissing.

Community Awareness:

- Agencies do a poor job in promoting services geared to the youth.
- 16 year olds not one agency is responsible for them
- Providers in the community (including physicians) need more education about this population and how to best address their needs
- The community at large needs to be made more aware of the extent of homelessness (to enlist their support for fundraising, advocacy and policy change).

Question:

What is working well for this target population (best practices)?

Feedback received from Providers:

- “I think the Futures Program in North Bay is excellent because it is a structured living program that teaches youth the necessary skills to succeed in the real world”.
- “The Futures Program is presently the best program, YES is very present, the Schools do a great job (Chippewa offers effective alternative education programs) and the drop-in centre offers a great service.”
- LIPI is a great support for the homeless and at-risk youth population – but they need more resources/staffing to target the service needs of the youth population.
- “Youth are resilient, they can bounce back as compared to adults, they will heal faster, we therefore need to develop services that will respond to the needs of these youth.”

- Guidance counselors at local high schools are very useful and often serve as trustees for youth.
- Collaboration amongst local service providers is very good and efforts to work together as one service system appears to be moving in a positive direction.

Question:

If additional resources were available, what housing strategies and/or programs would you recommend be put in place to address the needs of this target population?

Feedback received from Providers:

- More Futures Programs. Programs where youth can live in a group setting and have structured activities, schooling, life skills. These programs are critical because we are sending youth into a society with no budgeting skills, and a lack of life skills. Additionally, some youth have serious addiction and mental health issues that have not been dealt with.
- Develop the concept and build a Transitional Home with structured programs including life skills training dedicated to youth, the Crisis Centre should be the lead for this new service.
- Build a new shelter that would provide 24/7 programs to help youth stay off the streets and address why they are homeless. This shelter would be the first step towards a transitional housing program and then to an affordable housing opportunity.
- An additional dedicated Housing in Trusteeship Worker would be very beneficial in supporting the needs of homeless and at-risk youth in the community.
- North Bay should consult with similar residential programs for youth such as Say Cedar in Sudbury and the Peter House in Sault Ste. Marie to work towards creating a similar residential facility for youth in Nipissing.
- Youth need a safe, reliable place together, stay and play. North Bay requires a much needed shelter.
- Community Outreach Workers (street level) should be hired to interact with youth on the streets and support them in coordinating access to services and programs which can address their primary needs. Once stabilized, these youth will have a better chance to successfully reintegrate into the community.
- The community should also explore viable opportunities for expanding the pool of safe beds for youth in crisis who require short-term accommodation.

Question:

Do you have any suggestions how existing service providers could work together (collaborate) to better meet the needs of the community's homeless and at-risk youth population?

Feedback received from Providers:

- North Bay and area agencies are working well together, there is a broad based participation and efforts should continue in formalizing partnerships and protocols amongst involved service providers. (i.e. No Wrong Door)
- “Community already works well in collaborative way but we are still stuck with our mandated silos...this is one issue where we need to think out of the box.”
- Enhancing client access to services through integrated planning amongst service providers is a valuable approach – however, there is an outstanding need to have more financial and human resources to deliver the range of services and supports required.

7.0 Consultation With At-Risk Youth – Key Findings

Obtaining feedback from homeless youth was also identified as an important component of the stakeholder consultation process. Identifying and engaging homeless youth to share their views and experiences was not a simple task. However, with the support of Crisis Centre North Bay a focus group was arranged with 9 youth who are residents of the Futures Residential Program as well as supervisory and residence staff. The Futures Program is a 10-bed residential facility (home) for youth aged 16-24 who can't live at home but want to continue with school or training to move them toward independent living. As part of their stay, youth must identify a goal plan for their lives and agree to not use alcohol or drugs during their stay. Youth pay room and board through a shelter allowance via Ontario Works and the average length of stay for residents is between 6 months to 1 year.

Hearing first-hand from homeless youth provided very useful information for the project and their unique observations and experiences provided valuable insight on the functioning of the current service delivery system – from a youth perspective. After hearing their stories and opinions, it appears that at-risk youth are not aware of community resources available for them and that they face a number of barriers in successfully transitioning from homelessness to community and family life.

In this regard, focus group participants were asked a series of questions and provided the facilitator with their responses. A summary of this feedback is outlined below.

Feedback from Youth

Question:

Based on your experience, what are the key reasons for youth homelessness in this community?

Participants provided the following responses:

- ❖ Difficult home lives (fighting with parents)
- ❖ Mental health issues of parents
- ❖ Drug and alcohol abuse (both of youth and parents)
- ❖ Physical abuse and violence in the home
- ❖ Lack of finances to afford apartment rental payments
- ❖ Lack of employment opportunities (employers do not want to hire youth who have been in conflict with the law)
- ❖ Landlords do not want to rent to 16 year olds because they think they are not responsible

Question:

Does North Bay / Nipissing District have adequate services and supports in place to meet the needs of homeless and at-risk youth?

Participants provided the following responses:

- ❖ “there are no phone numbers for available services in North Bay”
- ❖ Apart from the kids help line and suicide prevention phone number – there really is no one to talk to when you find yourself in a homeless situation.
- ❖ There is a need for more youth shelters in North Bay
- ❖ The Transition House is not the best place for girls as many of the women there are in crisis and escaping violent partners (difficult environment for youth in crisis)
- ❖ Existing shelters need repairs and renovations

Question:

Are you aware of local services/programs/resources which are currently in place to support the needs of the homeless and at-risk youth population?

Participants provided the following responses:

- ❖ Youth identified that they were aware that there were shelters for women in the community (Transition House, Amelia Rising etc) but that there were no shelters for men.
- ❖ Can talk to staff of Crisis Centre but there are long wait lists for mental health counseling and addiction services locally
- ❖ Participants expressed that they really didn't know of any other programs or services for homeless youth in the community.
- ❖ Participants said they knew there was a food bank in North Bay – but didn't know where it was located or what the hours of operation were.

- ❖ Some participants knew of breakfast clubs for students – but explained that these were only available in some of the schools.

Question:

What other areas of your life does your homelessness affect? (i.e. impact on education/health/addictions etc.)

Participants provided the following responses:

- ❖ Without security of your home – difficult to focus on any other areas of your life
- ❖ The lack of parental and family support impacts your emotional well being significantly
- ❖ Causes poor nutrition
- ❖ Dental and health care are secondary concerns when you are in crisis
- ❖ Unlikely to attend school or be able to concentrate on studies
- ❖ Youth turn to drugs/alcohol as a way of coping with their crisis situation or to escape from the pain and isolation
- ❖ Being able to trust people again is very difficult

Question:

In your opinion, what needs to be done to address the needs of the area's youth homeless and/or at-risk populations?

Participants provided the following responses:

- ❖ There is a need for outreach support for homeless/at-risk youth
- ❖ Need more shelters for youth
- ❖ The Futures Program should be expanded so others can reside here (or at a new site)
- ❖ Ready access to counseling – no wait lists also need more family counseling and intervention services
- ❖ More designated apartments for youth that are affordable
- ❖ More welfare money
- ❖ Put more information out in the community to let youth know where they can go if they are experiencing problems
- ❖ A drop in and information centre would be very valuable for local youth
- ❖ Need opportunities for employment (this is a priority issue) – very difficult to get an opportunity when you have a criminal record or have dropped out of school.
- ❖ Need training programs for employment (need jobs and employment experience to get ahead)
- ❖ Community needs to be made more aware of the issue and be made aware that homeless youth are not “bad people”
- ❖ Staff estimated that 70% of homeless youth do not choose to be homeless – rather they find themselves with unfit parents or dangerous households.
- ❖ Having access to designated trustees to assist youth in applying for welfare would definitely be helpful.

8.0 Priorities & Recommendations for Action

Based on the information received through this comprehensive needs assessment process a number of key priorities and corresponding recommendations for action were identified to move forward in addressing the needs of homeless youth in the community. These recommendations are intended to serve as a workplan for the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership who will need to assume a leadership role in working together to develop and implement strategies to achieve these workplan goals and objectives.

These implementation activities consist of short, medium and long-term planning initiatives and a number of these priorities can be achieved without additional financial or human resources. Other recommendations will require new sources of dedicated funding or additional staffing if they are to be realized in the future. Consequently, the following priorities and recommendations for action have been put forward to address the issue of youth homelessness in North Bay and surrounding communities.

Access to Financial Support:

It is recommended:

- ✓ That the Nipissing Homeless Partnership advocate for regulatory changes to Social Assistance which support the needs of local Homeless and At-Risk youth (providing access to social assistance for 16-17 year olds who do not have a trustee).
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership examines the roles and requirements involved in assuming the role of trustee, determine the annual community need and explore options for establishing a dedicated interagency pool of trustees to assist 16-17 year olds applying for social assistance in Nipissing.

Housing / Shelter:

It is recommended:

- ✓ That a Community Housing Support Worker should be hired which would be dedicated to the Youth Homeless and At-Risk population. This position would support youth in securing suitable housing, negotiating rental agreements and paying monthly rent on their behalf.
- ✓ Given that there is currently no transitional housing available for youth in North Bay and surrounding communities that the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership continue to advocate for new transitional housing models/units which address the needs of the hard-to-serve youth population. (This population would include individuals with serious mental health and/or addictions problems, or who may be in conflict with the law) who may not qualify for other residential programs in the community.

- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership continue to support local efforts to expand the range of affordable housing in the Nipissing District. To this end, the NHP could provide existing planning groups with data on the needs of the homeless youth and low-income populations in the community and continue to advocate for additional support from all three levels of government.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership explore viable opportunities to expand the range of residential programs for youth in the catchment area. Any new programs should build on the success of the Futures Residential Program in North Bay which has been identified as a best-practice model by local providers who have expressed the need to expand its program capacity for District youth.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership work closely with West Nipissing, Mattawa and surrounding communities to share information and ensure a consistent planning process is in place to address the shelter needs of homeless youth in each of these respective jurisdictions.

Access to Support Services:

It is recommended:

- ✓ That designated Outreach Worker(s) be hired to provide street-level liaison with homeless and at-risk youth in North Bay. These workers could provide initial counseling and support, access to emergency shelter, and information and navigational support for accessing required support services in the community. * A key role of this worker would be collecting statistics on hard-to-serve youth and establishing a client database (of homeless individuals) to support interagency service planning and advocacy.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership work with existing youth initiatives such as the North Bay Youth Action Team to explore opportunities for establishing a drop-in centre for youth. This drop-in centre would provide valuable information and referral, crisis counseling as well as individual and group peer support.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership coordinate planning with local mental health service providers to provide immediate (on-demand) mental health counseling services to homeless and at-risk youth who find themselves in crisis.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership work closely with Municipal representatives to establish additional social, recreational and volunteer opportunities for at-risk youth within the community.
- ✓ That a more consistent and proactive planning process be put in place (with out-of-district custody/detention facilities) to support positive reintegration/transition of local youth. It is also recommended that the mandates of local service providers involved in

undertaking discharge planning and providing after-care support for youth in custody be reviewed to ensure that processes/procedures and resources are being used effectively.

Employment & Education Programs:

It is recommended:

- ✓ That the Nipissing Homeless Partnership initiate a planning process with the local business community to establish a Youth Mentorship Program in North Bay. This program would provide at-risk youth with valuable employment experience and skills training to support job readiness and independent living.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership continue to work closely with local school boards and educational institutions to develop flexible alternative education programs for at-risk youth which support individualized learning and effective transition to the local workplace.

Service System Coordination & Planning:

It is recommended:

- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership support the establishment of a single consolidated client database as well as a single intake process to support coordinated service delivery to clients. This should build upon the No Wrong Door pilot project currently being led by LIPI.
- ✓ That Youth Homelessness remain a planning priority for the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership and that a process to monitor the on-going status of youth homelessness in Nipissing be implemented within the community.
- ✓ That the Nipissing Homeless Partnership advocate as a coalition of agencies for increased funding and human resources to continue the important work of the group in developing a “system of support” for the homeless in Nipissing.

Community Awareness:

It is recommended:

- ✓ That the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership develop a targeted communications and public awareness strategy to inform both the public and providers about the issue of youth homelessness in North Bay and surrounding communities. This strategy should aim to reduce the stigma for youth and to inform the broader community that homelessness is most often not a choice but an unfortunate reality for youth.

- ✓ That available services for homeless and at-risk youth including locations and contact numbers be marketed throughout the catchment area so that local youth know where they can access help if they need it.

9.0 Next Steps

As previously identified, the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership will need to assume accountability for championing an implementation workplan to address youth homelessness in the catchment area. To this end, critical next steps in moving the process forward include the following:

- After the Needs Assessment of Homeless and At-Risk Youth is officially endorsed by the NHP, this community planning table will need to develop a coordinated workplan to address priorities and implementation recommendations; and
- Once implementation activities and funding requirements have been fully identified, the project consultant will work with the Director, Operations and Client Services (DNSSAB) to determine viable sources of financial support and make formal applications/proposals for funding as required; and
- The summary Needs Assessment report should be shared with community partners, local governments and the media to enhance public awareness and promote increased community involvement in addressing the issue of youth homelessness.

11.0 Closing Comments

Undertaking this Needs Assessment has been a valuable exercise for the Nipissing Homelessness Partnership. It has allowed for the collection of important data on the needs of homeless and at-risk youth as well as identified a framework for addressing the priority needs of this target population. Furthermore, while collecting exact statistical data on the prevalence of youth homelessness has been a difficult task – significant qualitative evidence and feedback received from providers and youth confirm that the issue of youth homelessness is a serious one within the Nipissing District.

By providing leadership and continuing to work as a collaborative entity, the NHP is well positioned to implement strategies that effectively respond to the needs of youth in crisis as well as preventing youth homelessness from occurring in the future.