



Bruce Rivers
Executive Director
Covenant House Toronto
20 Gerrard Street East
Toronto, ON M5B 2P3
Direct Line: (416) 204-7079
rivers@covenanthouse.ca

To: **Executive Committee, Toronto City Council**

DATE: **Wednesday, January 23, 2019**

RE: **Ex1.1 Implementing the 'Housing Now' Initiative**

As Canada's largest agency serving at-risk, homeless and trafficked youth, Covenant House Toronto changes lives by providing the widest range of services and support to as many as 300 youth a day. Since opening our doors in 1982, Covenant House has served almost 95,000 young people.

Most homeless youth are not on the street by choice. They come from every part of the country and are of any background, and most have fled or been forced out of homes where there is abuse and childhood trauma. Youth are staying in our 96-bed crisis shelter 26 per cent longer than they did ten years ago.

The demand for youth shelter beds is high: on any given night in Canada, up to 7,000 youth may be homeless. Each night, over 500 youth are occupying youth designated emergency shelter beds. Unfortunately, due to this high demand, some have no choice but to use the adult system or stay on the street.

A contributing factor is Toronto's expensive rental market and the unfortunate reality that youth experiencing homelessness lack stable, affordable housing and sustainable employment opportunities. We support the City Council's commitment to develop 1,800 new supportive housing units in Toronto, starting this year and going forward for a total of 18,000 new units in 10 years. Housing is key to long-term stability and success. We know that by providing young people with a wider range of housing options, in addition to mentorship, guidance and support, they can achieve better long-term outcomes.

Youth need diverse housing options that meets their unique needs. This includes dedicated supportive transitional housing, and new deeply affordable housing that the City, local service providers and provincial healthcare providers can layer supports into.

We must respond to the real, urgent and emergency needs of youth experiencing homelessness while also providing long-term, stable and diverse housing options for youth. By providing youth with the support they need to transition out of homelessness into stable, independent lives, we can work to prevent long-term, chronic homelessness that continues into adulthood.

We can't end youth homelessness through an expansion of shelter and emergency services. We need to provide youth specific housing options and approaches, and shift our focus from managing the crisis to preventing it.



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A housing first approach for youth requires different models of accommodation and services including family reconnection support, varying levels of supported housing, transitional housing and independent living options.

Conclusion

We strongly urge you to commit to more long-term, affordable housing options for youth, including supportive and transitional housing, not just more shelters. Youth experiencing homelessness in Toronto require specific supports to enable them to grow and develop into healthy adults.

Sincerely,



Bruce Rivers
Executive Director



Louise Smith
Associate Director, Community and Government Relations