3 Pathways Towards Stability: Young People's Transitions Off of the Streets

Jeff Karabanow, Ted Naylor

The majority of studies on homeless youth focus on pathways into homelessness, and street culture (day-to-day life on the streets). Such a focus has revealed a great deal about the causes and consequences of life on the street, and includes multiple well-known causes of youth homelessness, including a troubled family life, abuse and trauma, poverty, addictions and mental health issues and involvement in the child welfare system. Too often, however, the picture of life on the street remains incomplete, with little understanding of how some of these young people manage to move *off* the street and build/rebuild an identity that does not include "homeless" or "street engaged" (Karabanow et al., 2005; Mayock,et al., 2011). In other words, we know a lot about pathways onto the streets for kids, but little about the ways in which they get off the street and enter back into what we might call 'mainstream' society.

The focus of this study was to talk to youth, many of whom were no longer living on the street and some of whom were still engaged in street life, about the ways in which they have attempted to get off the street (for a complete discussion of methodology, see Karabanow et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2008[1]). The voices of 128 young people (90 males, 38 females) and 50 service providers in six Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Calgary, Ottawa and Vancouver), reveal several connected themes related to the street exiting process, including contemplation (thinking about getting off the street),

---

1. This article is an abbreviated and revised version of earlier work - Karabanow, J. (2008). Getting off the Street: Exploring young people's street exits. *American Behavioral Scientist,* vol. 51(6), 772-788.

motivation to change, getting help, transitioning from the street, changing daily routine, and redefining one's sense of self (see Table 1). Alongside these exiting factors, the formal connections to groups, supports and services that street youth interact with every day, from drop-in centres to homeless shelters, were also found to play significant roles in supporting young people's possible exit from street life.

Table 1

Demographic overview of youth participants						
	Females			Males		
Location of interview	N	Age Range	Mean Age	N	Age Range	Mean Age
Halifax	12	18-25	21	21	16-27	21.3
Toronto	8	17-27	19.87	17	18-23	20.37
Ottawa	2	17-20	18.5	5	21-26	24.4
Montreal	4	18-25	21.5	15	20-27	22.18
Calgary	2	23	23	18	18-27	23.16
Vancouver	10	17-23	19.3	14	17-23	21
TOTALS	38			90		

Table 2

Service provider participants	
	Number of Participants
Halifax	8
Toronto	11
Montreal	10
Calgary	8
Vancouver	12
Ottawa	1
TOTAL	50

A Portrait of a Street Youth

Simply put, there is no clear definition to describe what makes a young person a 'street youth'. The population is diverse and often temporary, with youth drifting in and out of different circumstances and experiences (Karabanow, 2004a). That said, most of us have a vague sense of who street youth are, but give little thought as to how someone ended up on the street, let alone how they might get off the street.

For this study, homeless street youth are defined as young people (between the ages of 16 and 24) who do not have a permanent place to call home and who, instead, spend a significant amount of time and energy on the street (e.g., in alleyways, parks, storefronts, dumpsters, etc.), in squats (usually located in abandoned buildings), at youth shelters and centres, and/or with friends (typically referred to as "couch surfing") (Karabanow, 2004a).

Pathways to Life on the Street

Exploring how youth enter street life is important when trying to understand how they might get off the street. For instance, according to the majority of

youth we spoke to, family life prior to becoming homeless included physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; violence and substance abuse within the home; and family instability, including numerous transitions and moves. The causes of such instability include divorce, separation, introduction of stepparents and stepchildren, moving houses, changing cities, and shifting living arrangements. The consequences of such chaos in the lives of youth is an obvious cause for concern, as family lives are often disruptive and inconsistent, with a lack of love, care, interest, and support from caregivers. It was clear from our sample that youth routinely experienced loneliness, boredom, isolation, and neglect (in addition to such traumas as being witnesses and/or victims of violence, abuse, and substance abuse) within their families. Many street youth find their way to the street as a way to free themselves from a very hostile home environment:

> That was the whole reason I would never try to live back home: in the last day/night that I slept there, my dad grabbed me by my throat and put me up against the wall 'cause I was thinking about leaving. So that was his answer 'cause my dad's very short tempered and high fused. . . . I would rather stay on the street than move back there. (Lisa, age 24, Halifax)

Another factor that often leads young people to the street is difficult child welfare experiences. Many of the youth we spoke to (over fifty percent) turned to the street after living in a group home or foster care placement. These experiences were most often described as uncaring, abusive, and unstable. It is hard to exaggerate the effect that such experiences have on youth. Moving from group home to group home (or foster home to foster home), and being made to feel "unwanted" or like a "criminal" or "delinquent," influences how many youth feel about not only themselves but also their life on the street. While perhaps romanticized, the cold, hard reality is that for many youth, life on the streets becomes a better option than staying where they are. Perhaps strangely, the youth we spoke to often did not see themselves as passive victims, but rather accepted the role they played in their negative home experiences. Many youth spoke of their active role in problematic family or child welfare experiences, whereas others saw the street as the only option when home or child welfare settings became unbearable. Others still, thought of street life as a "timeout" period to reflect on their particular situation. In the end, regardless of how an individual ended up as a 'street youth', young people play a role in creating their pathways onto and off the street and in building street identities (Karabanow, 2004a; 2006; Visano, 1999).

Where Do I Go From Here – Getting Off the Street

Since we now have a sense of what leads youth to life on the street, the key question is how youth get off the street once they find themselves there. The short

and simple answer is: if street youth keep trying to get off the street, they are likely to be successful over time. In fact, we found that it took on average 6 attempts before successfully getting off the street. Many different internal and external factors were needed to put together a realistic street exit strategy. These factors include: contemplation or reflection (thinking about getting off the street); motivation to change; getting help; transitioning from the street; changing routine; and redefining sense of self. This is important as it makes it clear that exiting street life is complex and consists of a mix of strategies, personal ambitions, structural supports and ultimately, persistence and the desire to get off the street.

Contemplation

In the case of the youth we spoke to, one of the most important factors in getting off the streets was first thinking about it as doable and realistic. In general, street youth often re-thought or looked at their life on the street differently after a traumatic street experience. These stressful experiences, often shocking to those who are unfamiliar with the daily challenges of street youth, included stories of physical and sexual assault, drug and/or alcohol overdoses, involvement with the criminal justice system (i.e. police and/or courts), and being a witness to street violence. For other youth, the motivation to 'change' was simpler and involved becoming bored with street culture and/or tired of surviving on the streets.

> *Then I looked at my life and realized, where am I going? I wasn't happy with how things were so I decided to try and change it. . . . I was like, I can't do this anymore. I can't just do nothing. I'm going to have to make a change.* (William, age 20, Toronto)

Ironically, the freedom that initially attracted young people to the streets can grow into aimlessness and boredom. And for young people, the struggle with day-to-day street survival – securing shelter, finding money, seeking food and clothing, and staying safe – can become overwhelming.

> *I mean, everything gets boring after a while. . . . Just really bored sitting on the street asking for money or trying to shine shoes or read poetry or whatever, you know, I'm just really tired of it, so it's like, I'm going to get a job and get off the streets for a while because it's boring. . . . I'm tired of this, you know?* (Roger, age 21, Halifax)

For some youth, heavy drug and alcohol use combined with a growing maturity and exhaustion was enough to make them want a change:

Now, I'm just trying to get the fuck out of this city because it's starting to, like, eat me alive and the drug thing is, like, too much.
(Jordan, age 21, Vancouver)

Although the majority of youth named boredom, fatigue, heavy drug and alcohol use, and aging as reasons for getting off the street, for others it was as simple as feeling "enough is enough." Very often young people were unable to accurately explain their reasons or strategies for getting off the street. In this sense, it is clear that getting off the street involves obvious, as well as unclear paths and elements. One service provider noted that the simple explanation that many youth use is that they are "finally prepared."

I have seen some kids, like, it amazes me, they'll be in it for 5 years and then boom, one day [they're off], and then I always ask them what made that difference and they're just like, "I was ready." It's always a simple answer, I was ready. I was just ready. So, I think, a lot of times it has to come deep from within them about being at their breaking point or whatever it is for them then. But yeah, then some people just never hit that and then, like, why is it that there are people that never get to that place? I don't know, that's a question I always ask myself, what makes that difference? (Service provider, Vancouver)

Motivation to Change

One of the key factors involved in the process of getting off the street is personal motivation to change. Life-changing experiences that might include becoming pregnant or having an intimate partner (i.e. a significant boyfriend or girlfriend), or even simply gaining support from family and friends can inspire one to get off the street.

Participants described street life as "exploitative," "uncaring," "ruthless," and "dangerous," and yet often showed an impressive will and hope for a brighter future. A majority of young people spoke about needing a "desire" to exit street life or having "strong will power" to overcome obstacles such as drug addictions, personal trauma, lack of housing and employment. Speaking of the lack of resources available, one participant noted:

Mostly, the only resource that will get the person off the street is the person themselves. They have to [want] to get off, they have to be wanting something. They want to be able to grasp something. If they don't want to grasp anything or want to move on, they're not going to move on. They have to have the will power to do it. (Randall, age 20, Toronto)

Findings reveal that young people who believed they had support from family or friends or believed there was someone in their lives who cared for them were more likely to be motivated to get off the street. Within street culture, asking for help was a struggle for most participants, but at the same time, an important part of getting off the street:

> *What didn't work was doing it on my own and relying on my friends that were in the same position because, I mean, it's a cycle and you just get dragged back into it again and again and if you don't have outside help.* (Ahmed, age 23, Vancouver)

The impulse for youth to move away from the street was connected to personal factors, as well as factors related to the system that homeless youth navigate. For instance, some of the personal factors identified by youth participants included 'faults' or a lack of will or motivation, as well as a bruised sense of self. Some youth were able to, somehow, overcome such obstacles almost entirely on their own. The majority of our participants, however, needed some level of guidance and support to plan an exit strategy and to stick with it long-term. Not surprisingly, youth with strong personal support systems (outside of street culture) had fewer struggles getting off the street. At the same time, young people with a strong desire to get off the street may have been more willing to ask for help. For example, responsibility for a new baby might be the push needed to exit street life. Bruno et al., (2012:550) recently published an article suggesting that for high-risk youth, early conception (of a child) is actually an opportunity to "conform to the conventional societal role of becoming a parent". Regardless, our study found that without enough support, even once a youth is off the street, it is very likely that their motivations will wane and/or circumstances will change and they will return to the street.

Getting Help

A third dimension of getting off the street for youth, which is connected to their motivation for change, involved getting help during the early stages of leaving the street. This included: the use of available services; searching for formal employment and stable housing; and some form of involvement with formal institutions (such as returning to school, entering supportive housing or starting structured programs, which might include employment and skills training). It is clear that service providers played a significant role in helping young people regain or rebuild a sense of self. Many of the study's participants used words such as "surrogate families" to describe their feelings toward service providers.

Young people on the street are faced with a number of complex challenges. These challenges include being part of an environment where trauma is an almost daily

occurrence, as is coping with physical, mental, and spiritual health concerns, and a lack of life and employment skills. In addition, we know that street youth have little in terms of "social margin" (Wiseman, 1970) or "social capital" (Karabanow & Naylor, 2010), which includes links and connections to a network of family and peers that can be used to "get ahead". As a result, services, which can include shelters, drop-in centers, health clinics, and second-stage independent living resources (including mobile care units, and outreach programs), provide basic needs (such as food, clothing, showers, and shelter) and life and employment skills training (such as how to manage a budget, cook, search for employment, and carry out a job interview). In this sense, service providers and programs for youth also act as a support for the everyday challenges youth face, to help them re-gain confidence and self-esteem within a "culture of hope" (Karabanow, 2004b).

Participants gave credit to service providers for helping them find job opportu-nities, housing options, and educational opportunities within an environment of care, safety, and learning. Young people saw street youth services as places they felt safe and cared for. Such settings often succeed in creating community environments where youth can begin to regain a sense of self and work out per-sonal dilemmas, while figuring out why they are on the street. The youth may even come to advocate against structural injustices (such as a lack of affordable housing or meaningful employment opportunities for youth) that maintain their homeless status (Karabanow, 2004b). For the majority of participants, not being judged for their homelessness and feeling that someone understood their struggles were key ingredients to feeling satisfied and engaged with the services they received from street youth agencies.

Transitioning From the Street

The process of transitioning away from the street was a complex and difficult stage for street youth. Moving away from the street required leaving the down-town core (i.e. physically leaving the area), while reducing ties with street cul-ture and street friends, and building (or rebuilding) relationships with main-stream society. Further still, leaving the street meant leaving friends, surrogate or replacement families, and the familiar routines and culture associated with the downtown core. For many young people, friends and surrogate families were made as a result of, or during, very stressful survival situations. Friend-ships made in periods of high stress and self protection tend to be intense and as a result many of these street level friendships can be very tight-knit, making it even more difficult to pull oneself away from the street. Put simply, the longer one spends on the street, the deeper the connection one would have to the street and the harder it would be to disconnect from street culture:

> *But it kind of compounds itself — the longer you're on the street, the harder it is to get off because you get more entrenched in the culture and you have more of the problems that come with that.* (Service provider, Calgary)

Youth also spoke about street life as more than a physical space and associated leaving the street with disconnecting from friends. While we commonly think, "why don't youth just leave!?!" it is obvious that breaking ties with street peers was different for each youth, but was generally seen as a slow, gradual and difficult emotional and physical process. However, speaking to the importance of this transitioning stage to getting off the street, the majority of youth stressed how disconnecting from friends who were seen as a bad influence was a necessary part of the exiting process:

> *Most of them come by and ask me, "Could you help me for 2 days, like sleep at your house?" I don't have the choice [but] to say no, because if I help them, they'll come back and see me and they won't help themselves, and since I need to help myself first of all, I don't have a choice either.* (Mohamad, age 23, Montreal)

For others, breaking ties with friends and with drugs was linked. Addictions were described as connected with street culture and street networks. Youth who had made it off the streets, into a more stable living environment spoke about the difficulty of dealing with their drug addictions. Youth also claimed that quitting drug and/or alcohol use was a very important step in their transition off the street and helped improve their self-esteem.

Many youth openly expressed the difficulties and challenges of leaving behind street friends. Cutting ties often uncovered feelings of confusion, guilt, abandonment, disloyalty, resentment, and loneliness. For some young people, street friends and street families made them feel secure, accepted, and loved, often for the first time in their young lives. Although participants were clear that breaking ties with street culture and friends was necessary to the transitioning stage, it is also clear from the findings that a majority of young people returned to the streets to visit street friends and street communities, interact with street youth organizations (which are predominantly located in downtown areas), and increase (primarily through panhandling and squeegeeing) their minimum-wage earnings from formal sector employment.

Youth leaving the street clearly experienced a range of emotions and feelings during this phase, including unmistakable feelings of pride, hope, and self-confidence together with loneliness, guilt, and disloyalty. These feelings were not only targeted at street culture and friends, as many youth also expressed

significant feelings for service providers, who were often thought of as surrogate parents. For some youth, moving away from street culture meant breaking ties with services that had supported them through very difficult, and highly emotional, times in their young lives. Others, however, continued to get help from formal services after they left the street, but did so in ways that allowed them to keep a distance from their former lives on the street. For example, youth might drop in on a support centre only when residents were sleeping or out of the establishment. Or they might meet a contact in the downtown core away from the formal organization in order to distance themselves from the street and maintain their newfound and hard-fought stability.

Participants also expressed that it was as difficult to leave the street culture and friends, as it was to re-enter mainstream society and build new relationships. Despite the emotional strains of leaving relationships with people who had helped support them on the street, building new relationships outside of street culture was seen as important for healthy transitioning. New friends and communities were seen by participants as "good influences" in their day-to-day living. At the same time, youth expressed that the transition period between leaving street friends and developing new relationships was difficult. They often spoke of loneliness and uncertainty:

> *I think it's really hard because I'm, like, in between right now because a lot of my friends still live street lives. They're all about partying and panning and I'm just not, so I guess it's kind of a lonely time because you're figuring out yourself and what you want to do.* (Heidi, age 19, Halifax)

Changing Routine

A fifth factor in getting off the street involved reorganizing one's routine in terms of employment, education, and housing. This phase included changing how one thought about the future and one's goals, while finding a way to support one's transition. During this stage, young people highlighted a new positive orientation to their life, supported by an improved sense of health and wellness, self-confidence, and personal motivation.

A change in routine emerged for participants as they transitioned from living on the streets to mainstream society. Youth described a whole set of new physical and psychological changes taking place in their lives, including feeling healthier, sleeping better, and an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence. Shifts in routine were commonly seen as connected to newfound stability and consistency in participants' lives and they spoke of developing new positive communities of support. These supports, which replaced

street activities, included formal employment and/or returning to school. However, subtle day-to-day shifts in routine (such as waking up and making coffee or coming home and watching television) were as celebrated as living in one's own apartment or going to work each day.

Somewhat surprisingly, considering the links between street youth and the formal employment market are often tenuous at best, one of the most significant forces of change in the lives of youth was linked to formal employment. Aside from the obvious (i.e. assisting with one's basic needs), work translated into a gradual shift in general lifestyle. Such changes generally involved the way participants managed time (work and free time) and viewed their future:

> I wake up, I have my shower, I get something to eat. I'm taken care of, I'm happy, I'm fed, and I go to work. It makes me feel meaningful about what I do with my day and so, I go out and I'm able to give to the world instead of just trying to take for myself, which is an amazingly positive feeling. And I can pursue the things that make me mentally healthy. The depression that goes with the street life isn't there, the feeling that I'm less than, my old idea of intellectual pursuit was dropping acid and talking about this and that. (Ahmed, age 23, Vancouver)

Rejoining mainstream culture introduced young people to a new way of life, and much of their new structure came from simple routines, such as attending work and/or school. Simple yet important, new routines such as sleep habits, meals and free time all positively help youth readjust to society. At the end of the transition process many youth reflected on their past experiences, and for the majority of participants, this meant perceiving the street as an unhealthy and destructive environment. Armed with a healthier sense of self, youth were willing and eager to imagine and plan for their future within an improved context of personal control, wellness and happiness.

"Successful Exiting" – Redefining Sense of Self

The last stage associated with exiting the street involved young people's emotional and spiritual sense of identity. As the previous stage shows, 'successful exiting' included a sense of "being in control" and "having direction" in one's life. The majority of participants spoke of feeling proud of their exit from street life, with very few regrets. Youth expressed the simple joy and pleasure of being able to finally enjoy life on their own terms, of possessing a healthy self-esteem and self-confidence, and of being able to take care of themselves and be stable in terms of both housing/security and personal wellness.

Youth described a variety of concepts when discussing what it meant to successfully transition from street culture. A truly successful transition from street life meant more than literally removing oneself from the street or finding housing. The youth made clear that the process of becoming an ex-street youth required emotional and spiritual shifts within themselves and for many youth success involved personal stability and being comfortable in their living environment. To this end, youth spoke of feeling "self-sufficient," "stable," "able to take care of themselves," and "in control" of their lives as markers of a successful exit from street life. In this way, feeling self-sufficient was a key to a successful exit. This translated into not needing street youth services or relying on social assistance benefits for support. Interestingly, this idea of self-sufficiency as a key marker of exiting street life was also expressed by youth still living on the street. As the youth pondered what success would look like for them, many explained that it would mean reducing one's need for services:

> *Well, to be self-sustaining, you know, to at least be able to come up with my own food money, spend it on food and, you know, pay rent.* (Danny, age 22, Calgary)

In the same vein, it is not surprising then that youth often described obtaining housing, employment, and education as a sign of a successful exit:

> *Successfully getting off the streets is getting your own apartment, having a very successful job, avoiding street life like not panning, not having to fly a sign or go squeegeeing or anything like that.* (Roger, age 21, Halifax)

Other young people expanded on this and suggested that rather than simply being housed and fed, they desired a sense of "home" and "stability":

> *I have a home. I don't have to worry about weather. I don't have to worry about, I mean, I'm a woman, so I don't have to worry about being assaulted or stuff like that. Like just things that people don't even think of, like, I don't have to worry about where my next meal is coming from or how I'm going to get heat or hot water or the embarrassment of going somewhere.* (Patricia, age 21, Halifax)

Leaving dangerous street activities (such as drug abuse and sex trade work or prostitution) behind was also noted as a measure of success and stability. In addition, participants identified positive feelings, emotions, and relationships when discussing their idea of success. For some youth, success was defined as a spiritual state of being – an emotion or feeling that provided a renewed sense of self:

I think success is a peace of mind. It's being able to sit down at the end of the day and feel satisfied with what I've done, with who I am and to live life to its fullest. Every minute is a success. That's where I want to be. I'm getting there. (Dana, age 18, Vancouver*)*

In all, successfully exiting street life includes various dimensions made up of both material and emotional elements. For almost all participants, becoming an ex-street youth requires stable housing, a return to employment and/or school, and a move away from street culture and activity. Other young people, especially those who had successfully transitioned off the street, added spiritual and emotional growth and stability to the elements necessary to their street exit.

Conclusion

Street youth are a troubled population who exist on the edges of mainstream society. It is a population that consistently experiences marginalization and stigmatization within society, and is continually monitored and harassed by both the police and members of the general public. They are poor and isolated, and have little in terms of social capital and social margin. As we know, they often appear "different" in looks and attire, and also have the added burden of being young, which makes it more difficult to find work and shelter. Most days they spend much of their time in public areas, where they must deal with criticism and marginalization while also having to worry about finding shelter, food, clothing, and social support (Karabanow & Naylor, 2010).

As we have seen, within each of the stages of getting off the street, young people spoke of social exclusion. For example, attempting to find housing and job opportunities as street youth proved extremely difficult and often humiliating. As one young person noted, "Who wants to give me a job – I look like a homeless kid. I am a homeless kid" (John, age 20, Vancouver). In this sense, each stage was connected with a set of challenges and obstacles (some personal and others structural) making getting off the street a complicated and difficult process. Reentering mainstream culture was the most difficult dimension, as young people were required to transition from an "identity of exclusion" (i.e., being different, feeling stigmatized and marginalized) to one of "fitting in" to mainstream lifestyles. Ironically, many youth found a sense of belonging within the street youth populations. For instance, the majority of street youth spoke of street life as a safer space than their previous environments, emphasizing the traumatic or horrific experiences that lead young people to the street in the first place. There was also evidence that street life can provide feelings of community and family for many youth, a space where some feel cared for, accepted, and even protected. Moreover, findings suggest that for the most part, street youth

services are seen as surrogate families for homeless youth, providing needed basics and safe and caring environments. It is precisely this sense of inclusion that makes it difficult for most young people to move away from street culture.

When exploring their hopes for the future, a majority of young people spoke of traditional ideas, including finding a loving partner, having meaningful work, raising children, securing some land, building a home and having a family (elements of belonging and being part of what can only be seen as "mainstream" society). This finding provides direction for how we as a society should think about helping youth with the exiting process. Reflecting on the data and hearing the voices of our participants, several recommendations emerge:

1. Develop ways of preventing youth homelessness that tap into its true causes, including poverty, family distress, abuse and neglect, violence, and failures in the foster care system. We need thoughtful educational strategies (such as runaway prevention programs carried out by numerous street youth organizations) to unscramble myths and stereotypes as to why these young people enter street life, survive on the street, and yet suffer. Along these lines, we need to invest much more heavily in our school and child welfare systems to prevent these young people from falling through the cracks and onto the street. For example, teachers and guidance counselors (for those schools that still have them) need better resources to support students experiencing significant tensions at home; child welfare structures need more investment in outreach and planning for independent living in order to create smoother transitions out of formal care.

2. Continue to support our existing frontline ("in the trenches") resources, including shelters, drop-ins, health clinics, and outreach services. They are the first supportive and healthy adult contacts that most young people experience when living on the street and they use creativity and compassion in helping street youth meet their basic needs. The majority of youth participants spoke movingly and passionately about the significance of such resources throughout the street exiting process. Additionally, one of our most important findings is that it took youth an average of six attempts to get off the streets. The patience and persistence of frontline workers is essential in supporting youth throughout their time on the street and their efforts to exit the street.

3. Develop thoughtful long-term structural development initiatives, including supportive and independent housing and meaningful employment opportunities for youth. There are many examples throughout North America of innovative partnerships between government, business, and nonprofit sectors working together to build such initiatives (e.g., Montreal's Dans La Rue, Toronto's Covenant House and Eva's Place, and Calgary's Open Door) (see Karabanow et al.,

2005 for in depth case studies of promising programs/services). Young people in our sample were clear about the need for safe and sustainable housing in order to begin seeking job opportunities. Moreover, young people highlighted the importance of securing well-paying and personally meaningful work. Not surprisingly, youth participants shared their struggles with securing full-time, stable employment that could pay the rent, buy food and clothing, and allow for some savings.

4. Build national and regional coalitions of street youth, policy makers, service providers, housing specialists, and academics that can share best practice approaches regarding service delivery, policy development, education, advocacy, and voice. Examples are beginning to surface – The Homeless Hub has become more than simply an inventory of homeless research, but an intellectual space where meaningful knowledge is being mobilized or shared across government sectors and public arenas; Raising the Roof, a national, multi-sectored, non-profit organization has successfully raised street youth concerns within public and government discussions.

Such separate yet connected dimensions will provide our young people with the proper support and a fighting chance to climb out of homelessness and, equally significant, provide opportunities for them to become citizens rather than clients, victims, criminals or worse, invisible and insignificant bodies.

References

Bruno, L. T., Butters, E. J., Erickson, G. P., & Wekerle, C. (2012). Missed conceptions: A gendered extension of early conception among street youth. *Deviant Behaviour,* 33, 550-565.

Karabanow, J. (2004a). *Being young and homeless: Understanding how youth enter and exit street life.* New York: Peter Lang.

Karabanow, J. (2004b). Making organizations work: Exploring characteristics of anti-oppressive organizational structures in street youth shelters. *Journal of Social Work,* 4(1), 47-60.

Karabanow, J., Clement, P., Carson, A., & Crane, K. (2005). *Getting off the street: Exploring strategies used by Canadian youth to exit street life.* Retrieved from Halifax Regional Municipality website: http://www.halifax.ca/qol/documents/GettingofftheStreet.pdf

Karabanow, J., & Naylor, T. (2010). Being hooked-up: Exploring the experiences of street youth with information communication technology. In E. D. Looker & T. D. Naylor (Eds.), *Digital diversity: Youth, equity, and information technology* (pp. 161-178). Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press.

Kufeldt, K., & Nimmo, M. (1987). Youth on the street. *Child Abuse and Neglect,* 11(4), 531-543.

Mayock, P., O'Sullivan, E., & Corr, M. (2011). Young people exiting homelessness: An exploration of process, meaning and definition. *Housing Studies,* 26(6), 803-826.

McCarthy, W. (1990). *Life on the streets* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Toronto, Toronto.

Visano, L. (1990). The socialization of street children: The development and transformation of identities. *Sociological Studies of Child Development,* 3, 139-161.

Wiseman, J. (1970). *Stations of the lost: The treatment of skid row alcoholics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.