

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

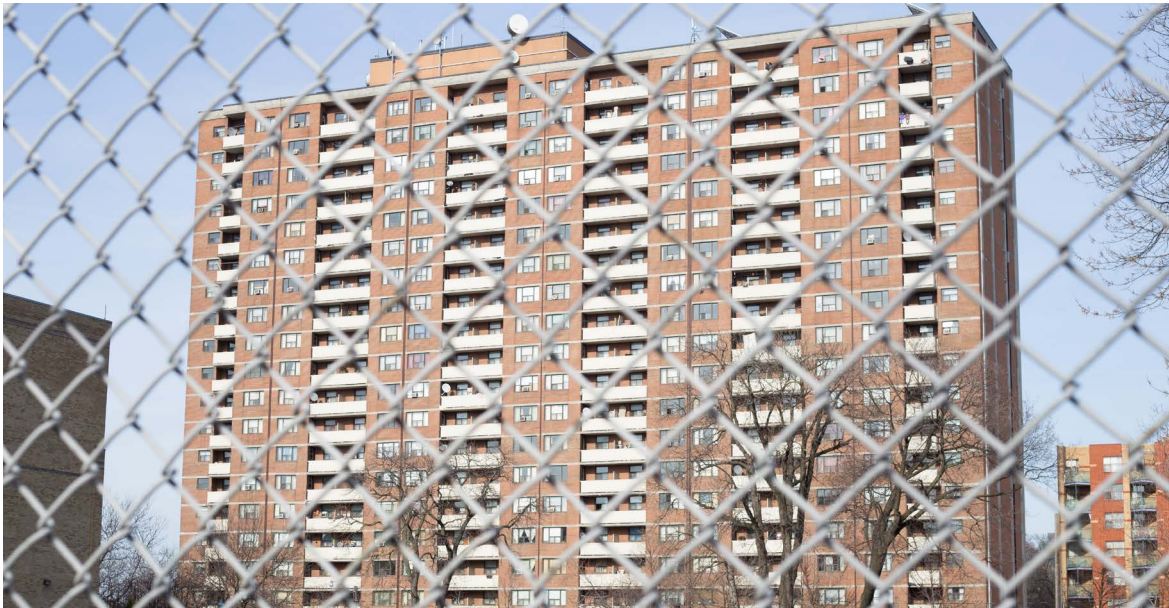
Overview

Transitional Housing refers to temporary housing that acts as a stopgap measure between homelessness and permanent housing. As it applies to youth in particular, it is usually housing with the necessary supports that enable young people to live independently.

Histories of abusive treatment, residential instability, addictions, and mental health issues add to the trauma of homelessness itself. Transitional housing is intended to offer a supportive living environment, opportunities, and tools for skill development, and promote the development of community among residents. These can be critical in enabling people to participate in employment or training programs, enrol in educational facilities, address addiction or mental health issues, and ultimately move to independent living in the larger community (Novac, Brown & Bourbonnais, 2009, p. 1).

Length of transitional housing programs can vary –especially depending on the population— but generally range from three months to three years (Barrow & Zimmer, 1999). Most transitional housing programs are housed within a building, but increasingly the use of scattered-sites with program supports is used. This type of housing offers less private space than is usually found in permanent housing. Space is often smaller and may include shared or single rooms and usually there is common space shared by all residents.

The primary difference between supportive housing and transitional housing is that residents in transitional housing are expected to “graduate” and to move on to a different type of housing or program (Barrow & Zimmer, 1999). In Canada, under the former SCPI program (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative) funded by the federal government, funding was available to build transitional housing, but not permanent housing. The lack however, of affordable housing in this country, has meant that except where an age mandate or a specific program was attached to the housing, many of the units have become *de facto* permanent housing for the residents.



An apartment building Toronto, ON. (photo by Shane Fester)

Transitional housing for youth is always limited because of age restrictions. In most programs, youth exceed the program mandate on their 25th birthday. While in some cases an agency may provide minimal follow-up support, there is no funding to do this and therefore is usually very limited.

Creating a sense of permanency then is very difficult for youth. Using a scattered site approach to transitional housing, which allows for “convertible leases”³ can help increase opportunities for permanency. Program supports can continue until the age of 25, at which point the youth may be ready for completely independent living or another agency, which serves adults, may take over the support component.

Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver are gradually increasing their scattered site transitional housing usage. In many cases, youth leaving their shelter/crisis care or their on-site transitional housing program are supported to transition to independent living with minimal supports still provided by Covenant House. Staff in both locations provide an in-depth aftercare program and youth in both sites are encouraged to reach out to Covenant House for support as needed (especially up to age 25). In a few cases, this off-site housing is obtained and supported through a partnership with a property management company (Hollyburn Properties in Vancouver and Toronto) or a builder/developer (The Daniels Corporation in Toronto).

This combination of on- and off-site transitional housing is a component of the Foyer’s Hub and Spoke model, which will be discussed in the next section.

3 Convertible leases allow an agency to initially hold a lease in their name but to transition that lease to a young person at an appropriate time. This can be used when a young person is 16 or 17 and too young to sign the legal agreement, or to facilitate a young person’s transition into housing. It may also ease concerns of landlords who are hesitant about providing housing to a youth.

Foyer – Hub and Spoke Model

The Foyer⁴ is a great example of a unique way of providing support to youth through transitional housing. Popular in the UK and Australia in particular, it is gaining support and popularity in Canada, including Haven’s Way at the Calgary Boys and Girls Club, New Horizon at Wood’s Homes, also in Calgary and The Foyer project operated by Homeward Trust in Edmonton. Both Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver have integrated their transitional housing programs with the Foyer model.

The Foyer model can be considered a best practice⁵ and there is an extensive body of [evaluative research](#) on the model. There are a broad range of [examples](#) of how it has been [applied](#) in various [forms](#) in the [United Kingdom](#) and [Australia](#).

The Foyer model houses youth for longer than is normally the case in transitional housing, provides life skills and the residents are generally employed, attending school/training or both. This is particularly helpful in the case of younger teens and those leaving juvenile detention/corrections centers or child welfare.

The Foyer is very flexible and models of accommodation have included congregate living facilities, scattered site models and approaches that combine the two (Hub and Spoke models). The Rights of Passage program at Covenant House –which is discussed elsewhere in the toolkit—has generally followed a congregate living model. Both Toronto and Vancouver have limited (but expanding) scattered site housing and therefore consider themselves to be developing a Hub and Spoke model.

- » The research on transitional housing models for youth – including the Foyer – has identified some important characteristics of effective transitional housing models. These include:
- » A focus on helping disadvantaged young people who are homeless or in housing need – including young people leaving care - to achieve the transition to adulthood and from dependence to independence.
- » A developmentally-appropriate environment to build competence and a feeling of achievement.

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4. For a full discussion on The Foyer model please see: [The Foyer Toolkit](#) and [Live, Learn and Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada](#).
 5. An intervention is considered to be a Promising Practice when there is sufficient evidence to claim that the practice is proven effective at achieving a specific aim or outcome, consistent with the goals and objectives of the activity or program. Ideally, Promising Practices demonstrate their effectiveness through the most rigorous scientific research, however there is not enough generalizable evidence to label them ‘best practices’. They do however hold promise for other organizations and entities that wish to adapt the approaches based on the soundness of the evidence. For a more complete discussion of the differences between best, promising and emerging practices see: [What Works and For Whom? A Framework for Promising Practices](#) published by the Homeless Hub.

- » A holistic approach to meeting the young person's needs based on an understanding of adolescent development.
- » A formal plan and agreement between the Foyer and young person as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to adulthood.
- » A supported transition that is not time limited, in which young people can practice independent living.
- » An investment in education, training, life skills and meaningful engagement in order to improve long-term life chances.
- » The provision of a community of peers and caring adults with emphasis on peer mentoring.
- » The provision of necessary and appropriate aftercare to ensure successful transitions to adulthood and independent living.

(Gaetz and Scott, 2012, p. 29).