



*St. Leonard's Society of Canada*  
*Société St-Léonard du Canada*

# **Beyond Custody: Positive Pathways to Housing for Youth in Conflict with the Law**

Submitted to

**Employment and Social Development Canada**

prepared by

**Anita Desai, (M.A.), Executive Director, Project Lead**

with assistance from

**Danielle Kouri (B.Soc.Sc.), Research Assistant**

for

**St. Leonard's Society of Canada**

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

March 19, 2018



This report is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada: Homelessness Partnering Strategy,  
Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Branch.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect  
those of the Government of Canada.



## **Beyond Custody**

### **Positive Pathways to Housing for Youth in Conflict with the Law**

© St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2018  
211 Bronson Ave., Suite 208  
Ottawa, ON K1R 6H5

Registered Charitable Organization  
#12894 6829 RR0001

#### **Author Contact Information:**

Anita Desai, M.A.  
St. Leonard's Society of Canada

Tel: (613) 233-5170  
Email: [anita@stleonards.ca](mailto:anita@stleonards.ca)

#### **Reproduction Information:**

The author and St. Leonard's Society of Canada give permission for the copying and distribution of this material provided that the original authors are credited if the contents are used elsewhere.

Electronic copies of this report are available at:  
[www.stleonards.ca](http://www.stleonards.ca)



## Acknowledgments

---

It was a rare opportunity to research trajectories toward homelessness for justice-involved youth. Traditional approaches to research in these fields are directed at primary prevention, with limited consideration for what happens to youth who *do* enter a custodial setting, and, what happens to them afterwards. Arguably, these are some of our country's most vulnerable youth, and generating evidence-informed approaches to creating more positive pathways to safe, healthy lives that are free from involvement with the criminal justice system is critical to achieving that goal.

The staff of St. Leonard's Home Trenton, led by Executive Director Kelly Nolan, are to be commended for their dedication to this project. The work they continue to do is ever-inspiring, challenging, and done straight from the heart. I would like to gratefully acknowledge their support in contributing time and energy to this project to ensure its successful completion and sound recommendations. I would also like to thank the many community stakeholders and Ministry representatives who attended the engagement sessions and provided thoughtful contributions to the discussion which informed the project findings and recommendations – we can accomplish more together.

SLSC was also supported by Research and Administrative Assistant, Danielle Kouri, who poured through data, organized the engagement sessions, and helped to finalize this report. Director of Operations, David Whiteley, also ensured the sound financial management of the project.

Finally, St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) gratefully acknowledges Employment and Social Development Canada for the opportunity to conduct this research.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Anita Desai'.

Anita Desai, Executive Director



## Table of Contents

---

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Introduction.....	5
Project Results and Lessons Learned.....	5
1. Data Collection .....	6
2. Interventions for Specific Populations.....	6
3. Strategic Partnerships.....	6
4. Improve Socio-economic Outcomes.....	6
Objectives and Expected Results.....	6
Objectives.....	6
Expected Results .....	6
Outputs.....	7
Outcomes.....	7
Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	8
Recommendations for Project Expansion .....	10
Key Findings and Success Stories .....	10
Key Findings .....	10
Success Stories.....	10
Innovation .....	11
Strategic Partnerships .....	11
Sustainability and Next Steps .....	11
Additional Comments .....	12

## Introduction

---

St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) is pleased to submit the *Beyond Custody: Positive Pathways to Housing for Youth in Conflict with the Law* report to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). SLSC undertook this project in collaboration with St. Leonard's Home Trenton (SLHT), an SLSC affiliate agency located in the community of Trenton, Ontario, within the municipality of Quinte West. The objective of this project was to investigate trajectories towards homelessness for youth in the care and custody of SLHT and to find meaningful solutions and strategies for improving outcomes through funding provided by the Homeless Partnering Strategy, Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Branch.

SLSC is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety since 1967.<sup>1</sup> Its mission is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. We endorse evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice, conduct research and develop policy, support our member affiliates, and advance collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice.

This report consists of the following components per the guidelines of ESDC for final reporting requirements:

- Project Results and Lessons Learned
- Objectives and Expected Results
- Challenges and Lessons Learned
- Recommendations for Project Expansion
- Key Findings and Success Stories
- Innovation
- Strategic Partnerships
- Sustainability and Next Steps
- Additional Comments

This report has been reformatted, without changes to content, from ESDC's standard reporting template. This has been done to encourage knowledge mobilization of the findings to the many youth-justice and other service providers who operate within challenging climates to best meet the needs of the people they support.

## Project Results and Lessons Learned

---

The intent of the Call for Proposals for microgrants was to fund small-scale projects or prototypes that develop effective practices, tools, or initiatives to prevent or reduce homelessness in Canada in the following four priority areas: **data collection, interventions for specific populations, strategic partnerships, and improve socio-economic outcomes.**

St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) endeavoured to focus the *Beyond Custody* project on all four priority areas and was successful in addressing these priorities over the course of the project term. SLSC undertook this project in collaboration with St. Leonard's Home Trenton (SLHT), an SLSC affiliate agency located in the community of Trenton, Ontario, within the municipality of Quinte West. The project contributed to the four priority areas as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> Registration #12894 06600 RR0001. Online: [www.stleonards.ca](http://www.stleonards.ca). SLSC is not a religious organization.

## 1. Data Collection

In collaboration with St. Leonard's Home Trenton (SLHT), SLSC created a survey using an online survey software based on SLHT's existing resident records. The survey was designed as an electronic form to be completed by SLHT's reintegration worker. Five years of anonymized data (N=45 residents) was input and aggregated to measure the number, scope, and nature of homelessness for youth residing at SLHT. SLSC undertook both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data to identify trends and trajectories toward homelessness for this population.

## 2. Interventions for Specific Populations

The project tools and design addressed the needs of youth in conflict with the law in the municipality of Quinte West, and specifically youth admitted to SLHT. More broadly, the findings highlight areas of concern and interventions for youth in conflict with the law admitted to open custody/detention residences in Canada.

## 3. Strategic Partnerships

The project design incorporated two, full day engagement session opportunities for community-based stakeholders. Attendees were provided with the opportunity to formalize and improve strategic partnerships. The first session was held in October 2017 (20 attendees) to showcase preliminary findings, flag areas of concern, and identify solutions. The second session occurred in February 2018 (29 attendees) and assessed progress towards the identified solutions/goals and continued to formalize strategic partnerships. Attendees ranged from direct service providers to members of the judiciary, representatives from provincial government, and municipal officials and funders. The engagement sessions resulted in the formalization of a Youth Justice Housing Committee that plans to meet monthly in order to maintain momentum on issues identified by the project, and to work toward meaningful solutions for youth in conflict with the law. At the time of this report, one such meeting which was well attended had already taken place in late April.

## 4. Improve Socio-economic Outcomes

The data analysis revealed a concerning risk of homelessness for youth in conflict with the law. Of the 45 youth admitted to SLHT from 2012 – 2016, none was stably housed at intake, and all were, at best, provisionally accommodated at discharge. Of further concern was the finding that 100% of youth residing at an emergency shelter at intake had no options other than an emergency shelter at discharge. This project clearly identified the housing-related challenges for justice-involved youth in this community and provided the opportunity to highlight the serious social costs of maintaining the status quo with community stakeholders. Utilizing the data analysis and overall project findings, the newly established Youth Justice Housing Committee will be working to improve socio-economic outcomes for justice-involved youth in the Quinte West area.

## Objectives and Expected Results

---

### Objectives (Per ESDC Proposal)

*This project is consistent with the program objectives to develop effective and innovative best practices, tools, or initiatives that prevent or reduce homelessness in Canada. The findings from this proposal will assist the recipient with developing and improving pathways to house young people beyond pre-trial detention or a custodial sentence and enhance strategic partnerships with local stakeholders.*

### Expected Results

- Identify housing trajectories of residents and gaps in service through data analysis.
- Increase stakeholder relations and enhance strategic partnerships.

- Enhance programmatic outcomes with provincial partners (i.e. Ministry of Child and Youth Services).
- Support St. Leonard's Home Trenton (SLHT) in achieving a community-informed approach to expanding housing options for youth at risk of homelessness upon discharge from their program.

SLSC is pleased to report that the *Beyond Custody* project achieved its expected results; however, it is clear from the results that additional resources and strategies are needed to address housing-related challenges for justice-involved youth in this community.

## Outputs

**Data collection tool:** SLSC developed and utilized a data collection tool that allowed for the aggregation of an anonymized 5-year data set for SLHT. Summary reports and filtered reports were provided to SLHT, utilizing the cohort data input by SLHT's reintegration worker. The tool will remain available to SLHT staff to input data on an annual basis and provide a summary and filtered data on an ongoing basis.

**Reports:** SLSC produced presentation decks for each engagement session based on the project findings and recommendations. Following each session, a report capturing the details and action items from the meeting was completed. All documents were shared with SLHT and engagement session attendees to maximize SLHT capacity for knowledge transfer. Finally, SLSC also produced a literature review on youth justice and homelessness, with a goal of exploring the intersection of these two issues in order to support project findings and recommendations.

**Strategic Partnerships:** Through the course of this project, strategic partnerships were developed locally, provincially, and nationally. Locally, the opportunity to host two engagement sessions generated the opportunity for SLHT to develop strategic partnerships with counterparts such as youth housing providers, the Children's Aid Society, justice sector representatives, municipal funders, and city councillors. This engagement resulted in the creation of a formal Youth Justice Housing Committee (YJHC), which will now meet regularly to discuss shared areas of concern, rather than doing so on an emergency or ad hoc basis.

Provincially, through enhancing dialogue and focusing attention on key issues related to housing youth in conflict with the law, strategic partnerships have been established with representatives from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). This partnership will extend beyond the project end date as SLHT explores the potential to create transitional housing space within its existing building. It is anticipated that this process will enhance programmatic outcomes with provincial partners, including MCYS.

Nationally, both SLSC and SLHT have become involved with the National Youth Justice Network and have been able to contribute to this group with the current project findings. This group has recently been established with support from the Department of Justice to highlight shared areas of concern occurring nationally within youth justice. Housing has been identified as one such area.

The combination of project outputs yielded diverse levels of outcomes:

## Outcomes

SLHT, while recognizing for years the housing challenges of youth placed in its care during open custody/detention stays, was able formally to enhance its understanding of how homelessness impacts its residents through this project. This enhanced understanding was shared at the local level with housing service providers and legitimized the need to focus community dialogue on justice-involved youth, rather than on at-risk youth in a more general sense. Further, it enhanced understanding of the important services SLHT provides to justice-involved youth in its community

and enhanced its capacity to be a leading voice for change for this specific population. Through the case study of this 5-year cohort, an understanding at the provincial and national level about the trajectories toward homelessness for justice-involved youth has been enhanced.

A micro-level outcome of this project was the placement of one SLHT resident who had been provisionally accommodated and identified as being at risk of homelessness in a community-based housing program where he is currently thriving. While it is not expected that all SLHT youth will meet the eligibility criteria for this program, it is promising that the engagement session dialogue has opened the door to potential housing placements for the SLHT youth who do.

One of the most relevant outcomes from this project was establishing a dialogue with provincial partners at MCYS to consider creating transitional beds within SLHT's existing building. The challenges associated with this outcome are outlined in the 'lessons learned' section of this report; however, to summarize, the output enhanced understanding of homelessness among SLHT residents. The outputs generated by this project will support SLHT to prepare a business case to submit to MCYS. This business case will advocate for partial repurposing of existing areas to generate bed space to address the housing needs of SLHT clients. This output is particularly beneficial to the study's target group since many are approaching the age of majority (18yrs). This output likewise offers the capacity to build independent living skills until the youth are able to apply for housing within the mainstream market.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

---

Since 1986, SLHT has provided residential services to youth under custodial sentences. It is well positioned in the Trenton community as an expert on youth justice and is uniquely positioned to understand the extraordinary challenges faced by its residents who struggle to be safely housed upon discharge. SLHT provides housing for up to 10 male youths between the ages of 12 to 17 years who are in custody or detention under the Youth Criminal Justice Act and offers a Section 23 school on-site for residents and community youth on probation. The genesis of the Beyond Custody study was rooted in SLHT's concern over the significant challenge to obtain housing for youth in their care upon the completion of their detention or custodial sentence. Overall, the project yielded lessons on expected areas, and a literature review was conducted to support project findings and recommendations. Challenges with project execution were minimal. Lessons are detailed below, and challenges are considered within the overall context of housing youth in conflict with the law.

A typology for homelessness was categorized in line with the 4 types established by the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#), including: *unsheltered*, *emergency sheltered*, *provisionally accommodated*, and *at risk of homelessness*. While the risk of homelessness was expected to be high for this population, the degree to which homelessness was prevalent within the 5-year cohort was much higher than expected. Of the 45 youth in total who were residents of SLHT between 2012 and 2016, none had stable housing when admitted, and only three were considered to have stable housing at discharge despite the efforts of available reintegration support personnel at SLHT. A variety of factors contributed to these results, but most predominant were: policy implications that prevented SLHT from maintaining jurisdiction over remanded youth (and therefore losing their ability to house them at SLHT), the lack of housing programs that could accept youth with offending histories (i.e. eligibility criteria), and, the lack of natural supports for discharged youth.

An example of a legislative implication that compounds the risk of homelessness for SLHT youth is the introduction of the Youth Criminal Justice Act in 2003. Nationally, there was a move away from placing youth in custody and increased pressure on the judiciary to utilize "off-ramps" to minimize youths' involvement in the criminal justice system. These principles, while commendable given Canada's earlier history of incarcerating youth under the Young Offenders Act, were not met with a



requisite supply of off-ramps related to safe, supported housing. Further, community-based correctional programs which had been established for youth to be housed in open custody/detention residences such as SLHT saw a corresponding increase in vacancies within residential programs. 15 years later, the issue of sustainability and viability for these residences is forcing the conversation about how to serve the needs of justice-involved youth, as well as to retain housing stock which can support broader national goals of ending homelessness. Many open custody/detention residences have closed, and those which remain are serving populations at record low numbers. To summarize, it is important to make distinctions among progressive legislation and its practical implications and impacts within communities. It should not be taken for granted that steering away from incarceration created positive results; but, perhaps that in this case its impact shifted away from criminal justice toward homelessness. The need for sound community investments in concert with progressive legislation may be the true measure for realizing the intended results.

A substantial amount of literature has been completed on youth homelessness, and most point to a lack of available housing stock as the main contributing factor. SLHT, however, is a 10-bed residence with an average occupancy rate of 11% (i.e. approximately 89% of bed space is not being utilized at any given time). The legislative implications of the YCJA to divert most youth from custody results in a re-designation of youth away from available youth justice supports. As such, youth become ineligible for continued residency at SLHT and must immediately seek alternative options. This can be difficult for many youths to understand when they are in receipt of care, food, support, and educational services in a nearly vacant program. This is also expressed as a significant frustration for staff who struggle to place these youth in appropriate housing. Additional complications arise with licensing through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), which presently holds the contract for all the available bed space at SLHT.

Strict criteria govern MCYS with legislation and policy to determine how youth are designated within the child welfare and youth justice systems, and as such, the degree to which they can be housed together. For example, youths may find themselves detained (yet safely housed) at SLHT while they await sentencing as 'justice-involved youths'; however, if they are not given a custodial sentence – as is often the case under the YCJA – they cease to be eligible for residency at SLHT and are no longer considered to be 'justice-involved'. The discrepancies in the profiles of these youth become solely bureaucratic in nature and do not address their needs which remain unchanged and ultimately unmet with respect to housing. Ultimately, this scenario has consistently forced an immediate challenge for staff to re-house these youth in a timely fashion. Often, even though youth are not formally charged, their offences (which occur frequently at group homes) render them ineligible to return to those same community-based options.

The lesson learned from the preliminary analysis led SLSC to explore the opportunity to repurpose 1- 2 of SLHT's 10 beds as transitional housing for residents, or youth on probation in the community. This process was initiated with MCYS in late 2017; but, given the complexity of reviewing legal implications with ministry licensing, the capacity for SLHT to provide transitional beds is still being determined. Provided that the legal/policy concerns can be navigated, SLSC is confident that the information generated through this study will provide the foundation to prepare a successful business case.

In the meantime, using project outputs such as the literature review and the National Youth Justice Network, SLHT is refining its approach by considering a Natural Supports Framework to support youth in their care.<sup>2</sup> This framework encourages a 'strengths-based focus' to build on supportive networks that surround at-risk youth. The data analysis on the 5-year cohort revealed that discharge

---

<sup>2</sup> The Change Collective. (2017). Working With Vulnerable Youth to Enhance Their Natural Supports: A Practice Framework. Calgary, Alberta.

to parents or family members was not always an appropriate trajectory for SLHT youth. While SLHT considers how a natural supports framework can be implemented to encourage improved relationships with relatives, a clear challenge persists with supporting parents or caregivers to be equipped with appropriate resources to care for justice-involved youth.

## Recommendations for Project Expansion

---

SLSC recommends expanding this project to offer SLHT the opportunity to pilot transitional housing for justice-involved youth in the Quinte area. The research findings reliably demonstrate that there is a need for such housing for this specific population, and likely beyond the 1 or 2 beds that may be created if a successful business case can be made to MCYS. Further, if a successful business case is made, SLSC recommends that this project be expanded so that transitional beds can be evaluated in order to maximize results and inform future practices in other jurisdictions.

Further to this, SLSC would recommend adapting a research design to explore the implications of for-profit group homes in the Quinte area to understand their impact on the ability to house safely at-risk youth. While the data collection was not initially designed to understand this impact, analysis trends identified that youth were discharged to for-profit group homes from which they had a history of fleeing. This was supported by discussion points raised at the community engagement sessions which suggested that a better understanding of for-profit group home operations may be warranted to ensure that such youth are being provided with the best chance for success.

Given the national interest in implications for youth justice service providers who are operating underutilized residential space, it would be timely to conduct an exploration of how these spaces can be used to support the Government of Canada towards achieving goals contained within the National Housing Strategy (e.g. 'Helping Those In Greatest Need' of which youth are a sub-category).

SLSC welcomes the opportunity to lead any expansions or undertake new research initiatives based on the information contained in this report.

## Key Findings and Success Stories

---

### Key Findings

1. SLHT youth are at a high risk of homelessness upon discharge with limited community-based resources or natural supports to address the risk.
2. The two engagement sessions indicate that the community stakeholders in the Quinte area, including Ministry-level partners, are willing to take collaborative approaches and are driven to find meaningful solutions.
3. Criminogenic risk factors for SLHT youth, regardless of court decisions, are a barrier to accessing traditional, community-based youth housing supports.
4. SLHT needs 1-2 transitional housing beds for residents to transfer into that would support graduated release and community integration, and provide time to secure safe, permanent housing solutions.

### Success Stories

1. One former SLHT resident has been successfully housed in a community-based youth housing program. It is anticipated that future residents who meet the eligibility criteria can also be referred.
2. While previous attempts to consider repurposing a small number of SLHT's beds were not being considered by MCYS, the outputs from the project have created a shift towards

consideration of how transitional bed space can be implemented within the existing legislative/policy structure.

3. SLHT will Chair the newly established Youth Justice Housing Committee meeting monthly with its community partners beyond the project end date to support justice-involved youth.

## Innovation

---

While there is abundant research on general homelessness in Canada, youth homelessness in Canada, and youth in conflict with the law, the innovative aspect of this project was exploring the intersection of youth justice and homelessness. There is a paucity of research available on how involvement with the criminal justice system contributes to broader issues of homelessness in Canada, despite literature which establishes that a bidirectional relationship exists. SLSC has undertaken a variety of research projects in this area to support research which addresses the unique community integration needs of people in conflict with the law and the corresponding need to balance community safety. Adapting research on housing for adults exiting the criminal justice system, SLSC was able to partner with SLHT as an expert in youth community corrections to advance knowledge on justice-involved youth as an important sub-set of the homeless population in Canada.

This project has allowed SLSC to support SLHT in generating a platform to advance creative solutions for how to house justice-involved youth within underutilized open custody/detention residences in Ontario. If successful, SLHT may serve as a model to other service providers who are navigating policy which accommodates multi-purpose residential programs for youth in conflict with the law. Given SLHT's involvement with the National Youth Justice Committee, and affiliation with SLSC as a national criminal justice organization, the capacity to communicate the project's outcomes and challenges is broad.

## Strategic Partnerships

---

SLSC and SLHT built on an existing partnership to create the framework for undertaking this project. Leveraging collective expertise, strategic partnerships were formed with community partners to take a community informed approach to addressing homelessness for justice-involved youth. This approach enhanced strategic partnerships with provincial funding partners to move forward with the possibility of creating transitional bed spaces for SLHT's clients.

The most significant challenge regarding partnership development was the 8-month timeframe. This project ran from July 2017-March 2018. Enhancing strategic partnerships to explore legal implications for changing provincially funded programs required additional time. Provincial partners were involved throughout the process by attending engagement sessions and staying apprised of research findings and recommendations; however, SLSC would have benefitted from having more time to support SLHT and MCYS in the exploratory and potential implementation phases of creating transitional beds within SLHT.

Overall, the partners engaged within the Quinte area were open and supportive of the research project. Both engagement sessions were well attended with representatives from a wide range of service areas. One potential area of improvement would be to increase engagement with Indigenous stakeholders, who were invited to attend but ultimately were not well-represented at the sessions.

## Sustainability and Next Steps

---

The following aspects of the project will continue beyond the ESDC project funding:

- SLHT will continue to explore the potential to create transitional beds within its existing building in partnership with MCYS.

- SLHT will serve as Chair of the Youth Justice Housing Committee that was established through this project in the Quinte area. This group will also support finding alternate solutions if the preferred solution of transitional beds within SLHT is not feasible.
- SLHT will also continue to participate in the National Youth Justice Network, as will SLSC.
- The data collection tool designed to analyze the 5-year cohort of residents will continue to serve as a tool which aggregates data annually for SLHT and allows for additional comparisons and analysis with respect to housing and other needs.

## **Additional Comments**

---

SLSC appreciates the opportunity to contribute to research that explores the intersection of criminal justice and homelessness. SLSC's mission is to promote humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safer communities. The opportunity to conduct this research facilitated direct support for an affiliate agency and will help SLSC to be better informed as it advocates for meaningful policy change in Canada.

SLSC encourages the Community Development and Homelessness Partnering Directorate to continue to invest in research which explores the bi-directional relationship between criminal justice and homelessness. For too long these social justice issues have been treated as separate. The work undertaken extensively by the St. Leonard's network suggests a clear link. SLSC is confident that investment in meaningful solutions for effective community corrections and housing practices for justice-involved persons will translate into meaningful solutions for safe communities and will help to re-establish Canada as a leader in effective corrections.