

# BEING YOUNG AND HOMELESS

Surviving in unhealthy environments

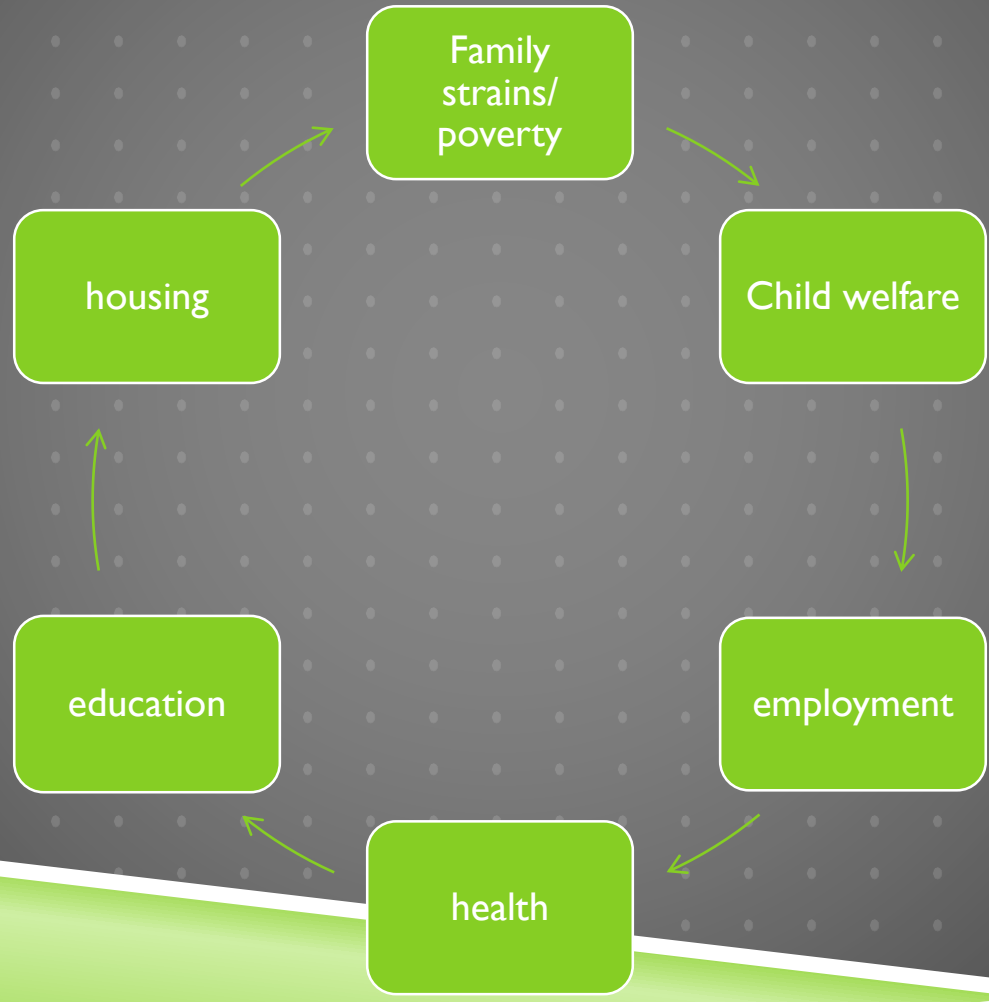
# LONG WAY TO GO

Story: Layla Sunshine  
Baby T  
Orlando Foster

Art: Sarafin



# INTERSECTIONS





# CONTEXT

- ▶ Diverse population
- ▶ Complex stages
- ▶ View as adolescents
- ▶ Layers of trauma



# COMMON THREADS TO ENTRY

- ▶ Family dysfunction
- ▶ Child welfare involvement
- ▶ Running away from something
- ▶ Rarely experienced stability and comfort

“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)



# STREET EXPERIENCES

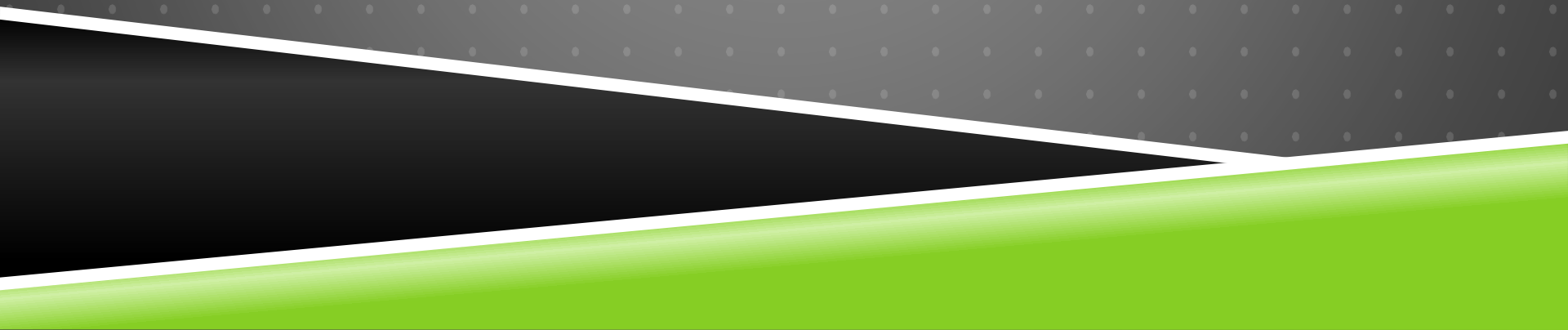
- ▶ Street is quickly demystified
- ▶ Survival mode
- ▶ Emotionally, physically, psychologically and spiritually unhealthy
- ▶ Sense of non-citizenship
- ▶ Street communities







# MAPPING EXITING DIMENSIONS



# CONTEMPLATION

- ▶ Disenchantment with street
- ▶ Boredom
- ▶ Traumatic event

“I was in Montreal and a lot of really bad stuff happened...I went insane, like my last five days in Montreal, I stayed at the Bunker [youth service], walked around, I just smoked weed and like lost my mind...It was either like man I’m going to let this guy take control...and go do smack and just die on Mont Royal [area in Montreal], or go home [to Halifax] and I went home and I think it’s like the best decision I’ve ever made” (Heidi, Age 19, Halifax).

“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)



# COURAGE TO CHANGE

- ▶ Increased responsibilities
- ▶ Family/friends support
- ▶ Motivation/commitment
- ▶ Someone who really cares

“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).

“I think drive has a lot to do with it, seeing hope. Some people have been hurt so much that they don't think anything good will ever come out of anything, so why try?”  
(Service Provider, Toronto).

# SECURING HELP

- ▶ Using services
- ▶ Employment/housing
- ▶ Education

“A lot of the kids have a hard time accepting help so I think that's a huge barrier. So the kids that can kind of say like, “yeah I'm in a rough spot, I need help” are the ones who are probably going to succeed and I think that that's a skill to be able to say I need help and a lot of kids don't have that skill. They weren't taught or they're ashamed to ask for help or whatever” (Service Provider, Vancouver).

# TRANSITIONING AWAY FROM STREET

- ▶ Leaving downtown core
- ▶ Slowly cutting ties to street culture
- ▶ Building networks of non-street friends/activities

“I found my biggest one [obstacle] was leaving the crowd that I was with, like my friends, the situation with my friends, because they were all like, “No, don’t go, stay down here and hang with us, go do this and go do that,” and that was probably my biggest crutch, was getting away from my friends because I’d been friends with them my whole life, and for me to just push them away and just say, “No, I’m getting away from this, I’m getting out of this.” It was a big step for me.” (Chris, age 21, Calgary)

# CHANGE IN ROUTINE

- ▶ Employment
- ▶ School
- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Future aspirations
- ▶ Renewed sense of self

“I mean, I work nights so I don’t wake up in the morning but 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...”. (Ahmed, age 23, Vancouver)



# “SUCCESSFUL EXITING”

- ▶ Being in control
- ▶ Stability
- ▶ Pride
- ▶ Enjoyment
- ▶ Self esteem
- ▶ Taking care of self

“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)

# SERVICE PROVISION

- ▶ Supports
- ▶ Surrogate families
- ▶ “Symbolic spaces”
- ▶ Unwelcomed
- ▶ Controlled
- ▶ misunderstood
- ▶ Reinforce marginal identity
- ▶ Lack of resources

# COST OF HOMELESSNESS

- ▶ **\$1,932 Shelter bed**



- ▶ **\$4,333 Provincial jail**



- ▶ **\$10,900 Hospital bed**



- ▶ **\$701 Rental supplement**



- ▶ **\$199.92 Social housing**



# HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES

- Recovery
- Deserve housing
- Adequate housing is precondition for recovery
- Get housing ASAP with wrap around services
- Diversity in terms of options
- Choice
- Harm reduction
- Youth driven



# ON THE GROUND SUSTAINABILITY

## Types of housing

- ▶ Return home
- ▶ Supportive housing
- ▶ Transitional housing
- ▶ Independent living

## Types of supports

- ▶ Housing supports
- ▶ Positive youth development
- ▶ Trauma informed care
- ▶ Harm reduction
- ▶ Education/employment/income
- ▶ Life skills
- ▶ Meaningful engagement

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Front line supports
- ▶ Long term structural development
- ▶ Advocacy
- ▶ Preventative structures
- ▶ National and regional coalitions