Open Door Needs Assessment Report

Lars K. Hallström, Wynn Coates, Karsten Mündel, Solina Richter and Naomi Finseth

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No particular observation or comment should be attributed to and specific individual, unless otherwise specified. Any errors in description or interpretation are those of the author.

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Canada
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Since the opening of the Open Door in 1998, progress has been made in responding to the critical needs of marginalized youth in Camrose—offering emergency, short-term housing and, more recently, a small number of transitional residences—and in making it known that these needs existed at all. Work remains to be done with respect to conveying the significance of the issues related to youth homelessness in the community, as well as securing the interest and commitment of the city and business community toward increased collaboration.

In this assessment, six demographic groupings were identified considered less favorable with respect to the services available within the broader Camrose community service network: (1) youth with children (often single and female); (2) youth under the age of eighteen; (3) parents and guardians; (4) First Nations youth (significantly, women and children); (5) residents over the age of twenty-four; and (6) youth subject to extreme instances of marginalization.

For conceptual purposes, three levels of conceivable cooperative capability among service providers were identified. Each corresponds to the respective degree to which the broader Camrose community service network would be able to provide services to those in need. At the highest level of possible capability, it is argued that a service network would be considered highly integrated, with the majority of providers recognizing the complex, holistic nature of social settings as well as the resources to cater their interventions accordingly. The relevance of time, space, intergenerational issues, intersectional identities and multi-layered problems within the lives of those in need were offered as important aspects of the landscape that service providers must negotiate.

Loosely ranked as “medium” in terms of service provision, Camrose community services was offered several recommendations, including that more attention be paid to the ways in which individual service mandates were constructed and operationalized, greater school engagement as well increased attention to and creativity in service sharing. Increased collaborative capacity was argued to hinge on the participation of the city—specifically through committing to hire a city planner—as well as the business community more broadly.

Finally, significant collaborative barriers related to what is termed “social service philosophy”—those convictions about social life broadly speaking that inspire the methods and habits of social service intervention—were found to divide local community service providers and many of those under the authority of the provincial government. After detailing the descriptions of relevant provincial social services, strong links were made between the general character, methods and habits of relevant government services and the global ascendance of neoliberal governance and policymaking in recent decades, with deep implication for Alberta. In short, these services embodied a “punitive” tone toward those accessing them, seeming to insist that it was through the market and labor force participation that marginalized “individuals”—not groups—would be best accommodated, and through which their well-being would best achieved.
Key Findings/ Recommendations:

Key Findings – Six “at risk” groups in Camrose community social network:

1. (Single) Youth with children
2. Youth under eighteen years of age
3. Parents and guardians
4. First Nations youth
5. Youth over twenty-four years of age
6. Extreme Instances of Marginalization

Recommendations for the City of Camrose:

1. Systematic School Outreach: Schools are one of the few existing venues wherein both youth and their parents or guardians can be “legitimately” brought together. While teachers and school administrators can provide the physical location for potentially engagement with families, service providers have the complementary opportunity to provide the skills and tools to make this engagement meaningful to both schools staff and students.

2. Public Transportation: The need for public transportation in Camrose was raised by nearly every single service provider and service user. This lack is exacerbated by the spatial disparity of service providers, particularly for those, such as young mothers, who may not have a driver’s license (even if a car was affordable), family or spousal support or the easy and affordable access to childcare that, weather permitting, might allow them to.

3. City Social Planner: Service providers see a need for a Camrose city social planner. This position would have to be sufficiently mandated and funded so as not to suffer the fate of the existing Social Development Committee which, while overflowing with a knowledgeable and well intentioned membership, is given no funding with which to carry out its plans.

Recommendations to meet the needs of Camrose:

1. Parental Education support and Skill-Development
2. Child Care
3. Youth Education and Skill Development, Mentorship, Recreation and Day Programming
4. Workplace Programs and Employer Involvement Initiatives
5. Men’s Shelter and/or Emergency Housing for Men Over Twenty-Four Years Old
6. Transitional Housing
7. Emergency Addictions “Detox Centre”
8. 24-Hr Crisis Response Team
9. Rural Awareness of Services and Regularized, Sustained Outreach to Schools
10. Toward Service Sharing and a “One-Stop Shopping” Model
Barriers to collaboration:

a. **Protectionism**: A sense of having or needing control and authority over the administration of a particular clientele.

b. **Convictions of a “correct way”**: An assumption that control over a particular clientele allows the organization to implement their services and intervention strategies on their own, in the “correct way”.

c. **Fear of joblessness**: The fear of what would happen if serious restructuring of service provision in Camrose occurred.

d. **The “earned” office and a fear of outreach**: The competitive nature of professional and the tendency to view the hard-won title and office as earned workspaces. The fear of outreach can be reinforced by both the threat of job loss and the opportunity and allure of climbing the bureaucratic ladder.

e. **FOIP, information sharing and red tape**: Many organizations cannot simply call up a relevant counterpart and begin sharing information and service planning.
PROJECT OVERVIEW

The purpose of this needs assessment is to establish the nature, scope and potential opportunities and challenges facing rural youth homeless in the Camrose region. Youths aged 16 to 24 who are unable to live with their parents/guardians are increasingly vulnerable to becoming homeless due to an insufficient supply of affordable rental housing in Camrose and surrounding areas. Furthermore, this youth population faces a number of additional challenges and service requirements due to mental health and addiction problems, exposure to abuse and family violence, lack of educational and employment opportunities and/or having been in conflict with the law.

This project is a first step toward a thorough analysis of the needs of homeless and at-risk youth in order to identify gaps in service and to develop a strategic action plan for the Open Door to create transitional housing and support services for this target population. To this end, the University of Alberta will undertake a short-term (5 month) needs assessment for the Open Door.

Rationale:

In a recent environmental scan conducted on homelessness in Alberta it was identified that rural-based communities did identify a lack of research related to homelessness in rural communities. The perception persists that homelessness is not as big a problem in rural communities as in urban centers, while the reality indicates that rural youth homelessness does exist, but is different. Better understanding the needs, dynamics and variability in rural youth homelessness is a necessary condition for appropriate and responsive planning and programming.

HOMELESSNESS IN CAMROSE

One of the objectives of this assessment has been to achieve a coherent sense of what youth homelessness within Camrose is or looks like, as well as broader sense of the conceptions of youth homelessness within the community at large. Considerable consistency was achieved on both of these fronts. Axioms like “out of sight, out of mind” and “not in my backyard”, however, are sufficient representations of a widespread sentiment said to define popular expressions regarding youth homelessness within Camrose.

When asked whether youth homelessness in Camrose was a significant issue, many interviewees insightfully reframed the question, preferring instead to interrogate what “significant” might imply as well as what a sufficient definition of “homelessness” might be. There was overwhelming consensuses that “couch surfing” was an essential descriptor. As a result—relying on private, informal networks outside of any traceable mechanisms—couch surfing epitomized the “hidden” or “invisible” character of homelessness in Camrose. The fact that there are few visible signs of homelessness was also attributed to our seasonally cold climate as well as the distortions created by the city’s long history of being marketed as distinctly healthy, vibrant, beautiful and retiree-friendly place to live. In addition, the significant number of community organizations that assist marginalized groups—whose mandated work is not recorded using any amalgamated standard, and some of whose extra-mandate activities go unrecorded and/or personally assumed, such as driving clients to appointments—also act to contribute to this “invisibility”.
Finally, it was noted that “Camrose is not a place driven by the ‘Alberta Advantage’ as much as we may like to think”, to some degree because “we’re just…not an oil and gas town”. Significantly, the development of the west end in the mid-2000s—a development that brought with it a significant number of low-paying food service, retail and hospitality opportunities—contributed to the emergence of a significant socio-economic demographic best described as “working poor.” Due to their perceived stability, however, this group is often overlooked as related to homelessness. Notable in this report is a call for parents to be more systematically “brought in” to those strategies aimed at addressing concerns related to youth homelessness, making families—and particularly those described as “working poor”—an important unit with which to engage in addressing patterns of intergenerational marginalization. Indeed parent-teen conflict was cited as a central concern in the context of youth homelessness in Camrose, with some arguing that younger and younger youth are being affected:

[In the past we used to think of homelessness as being more of like a high school older students population problem…And now what we’re finding is that students in junior high are also experiencing displaced homes and not sure where they’re going to stay and lots of kinda couch surfing and...And not really having a stable home environment...And so it’s impacting students younger and younger...Which adds to the difficulties, because these students don’t have the capabilities to know what to do when this is happening to them because they don’t have the kind of life experience that the older students do have.

Youth may feel deeply displaced, perhaps staying out as late as possible and involving themselves in risky behavior for the purposes of evading an unstable home life. Still others—older—may have a job, are the recipient of AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) or pool their resources with others to secure a place, often only until drugs, noise or inter-personal conflict or damage results in their eviction, disperses them. Some stay with friends or with the parents of friends. Few resources exist to assist these youth in getting out of these circumstances. Certainly the opportunities for peer groups to “replace” family are frequent and, as one service provider noted, “groups of equivalent risk...gravitate to each other” in a city as small as this. In instances of extreme marginalization—where a youth may not be regularly attending school, for example—there may be an entrenched resistance toward those services like the Open Door who, while capable of responding to their needs, compel those accessing them to subscribe to certain rules and boundaries. Certainly some have left home for related reasons.

In light of these observations a more complex definition of homelessness is required. For all interviewees, the overarching issue of concern is not whether or not one has a roof over their head, but whether or not their housing arrangement is safe, secure, adequate and not in disrepair or otherwise in substandard condition. This definition should encompass those who are positioned precariously enough to be considered be at risk of losing their home if their working hours were cut, or if they are confronted with an unexpected bill or expense, or if they are only managing their budget (and so a stable residence) by visiting the food bank. Homelessness, then, is a concern embedded within a far broader context than affordable housing alone. It must also include employment opportunity and quality, broad social service availability and accessibility and the opportunity for social mobility.
The effects of couch surfing and the other living arrangements discussed above, however, are far more than might be suggested by familiar definitions of homelessness. The dangers of these housing arrangements—ad hoc, ephemeral and often rooted in unequal power relations—were voiced with deep concern:

Couch surfing for youth in our community is not safe. We’ve had-, I’m aware of two incidences this year alone where sexual assaults in a couch surfing environment. When you take a look at the availability and access to substance abuse. When you also take a look at... from the couch surfing, lost possessions, lost property, associations with maybe not the best of positive adult role models, so they get influenced negatively into... and potentially could enter into the criminal justice system.

The opportunities for existing barriers to be duplicated are many, particularly for the female population:

I think I would certainly see with the female population almost that sense of...almost that sense of prostituting themselves but they don’t see it as that. So probably having an older boyfriend or somebody where I would see it as they’re providing sexual favors but they see it as a place to stay, or somebody cares about me. I would see that with the female population. With the guys I would see it as they probably meet somebody and run drugs and then have a place to stay. There might be that sense of couch surfing or they do something for somebody and they are able to stay with them.

Another service provider confirms:

When you don’t have a place to live so you’re living on a couch or you’re, you know, trading your body for drugs so you can stay at your friend’s house? Yeah. People don’t get that.

Speaking to the power relations inherent in many of these arrangements, another service provider detailed a particular set of parents in Camrose who are well known among relevant youth to offer their home as a place to stay. Far from altruistic, however, these accommodations were not accompanied by an interest in these youths health or safety necessarily, but were instead inspired by the need to fuel their own addictions: “the kid can do whatever he wants, as long as they pay me my $100 or whatever so I can go get drunk’, right…[T]hey just don’t give a crap…”.

The potential for peer-to-peer violence was also observed as an implication of the various living arrangements discussed above, infused as they are with the complexities introduced by substance abuse, differently marginalized individuals and chronic insecurity. One service provider at St. Mary’s Hospital confirms this:

For a lot of them it’s…you know, it’s a two o’clock in the morning thing, they’ve had fights or whatever. And, you know, got some...hand injuries or whatever that need to be looked after…And you find out they’ve been couch surfing or whatever, so...they don’t necessarily come in seeking our services to...to feed or to house them, it is they’re coming in for medical treatment. And in trying to do some follow-up with that, you find out that they truly have nothing.
This same service provider expressed one of multiple ways the realities of homelessness can become hidden, thereby offering some insight into how changing contexts—social, political, economic—have profound effects on where and how homelessness appears to us:

You know. And lots of kids have cell phones and that’s what they’re giving for numbers, so…you know, the good old days you’d hear, ‘Well, I don’t have a phone number’. But we don’t even…that’s…so even the simple demographics doesn’t always necessarily bring it out right away that they don’t have a…a home.

Careful attention, then, must be paid to the concealed nature of youth homelessness in all of its complexity, as well as the implications of this invisibility. Among those more dramatic repercussions described above, the long-term effect of insecure and unstable housing arrangements on things like nutritional and mental health, anxiety and reliance on negative coping mechanisms, concentration and educational attainment must also be considered.

THE CAMROSE OPEN DOOR
The Camrose Open Door began as a youth outreach initiative stated by the Camrose Church of God. In March 1998 the Church of God initiated a process to hire a youth outreach worker. Through a community outreach that summer 42 youth were identified as homeless/ couch surfing. By October of that same year, the Church of God began providing emergency shelter in donated hotel rooms. In 2013 the Camrose Open Door has opened the Keystone Centre, which provides transitional housing for “at-risk” youth in Camrose. The Camrose Open Door has a vision of a community that provides youth with the best opportunities to succeed. Their mission is to meet the needs of youth ages 11-24 who find themselves at risk. The purpose of the Open Door is to be a “VIAlive” organization; Visible – where youth are, Initiators – initiate contact with youth, Available – there when youth need them.

Beliefs

- We believe all youth are of intrinsic worth and dignity
- We believe that youth have the right to a safe living environment.
- We believe youth have the right to have their basic needs met.
- We believe all people are complex beings with physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional and social needs.
- We believe all youth have the right to be viewed and treated as a redeemable resource and as potential leaders.
- We believe all youth should be viewed as capable of changing, growing and becoming connected to the community.
- We believe all youth have the right to learn from their mistakes and to have support to learn that mistakes do not mean failure.
- We believe all youth deserve positive relationships.

Values

- We pursue wholeness of mind, body and soul.
- Our programs are relationship based and community focused.
- We are solution focused.
- We are strength based.
Education is a vital aspect of all our activities.
We provide a growth producing environment for all we serve. (youth, staff, volunteers, community)
We never give up on youth

NEEDS ASSESSMENT METHODS:
Identification of Relevant Service Providers, Securing Cooperation

Recruitment for participation in this assessment was undertaken in two ways: First, a “request for interviewees” was sent via email to all service providers belonging to the local Interagency association. This email outlined the project, its goals and encouraged their role in reaching the project objectives. This “request for interviewees” was also published in the Interagency newsletter. Secondly, an informal survey of organizations not formally belonging to this Interagency collective was conducted, and contact was made by phone and email outlining the relevant project information, discussed above. Due to the low response rate resulting from first contact, follow-ups were required in most cases.

Following positive responses from nearly all interview requests, selections were made as to the most appropriate service worker(s) within each organization with which to conduct an interview. In some cases managers were interviewed, in others frontline or outreach workers. If it was deemed worthwhile and feasible, both a manager and one or more frontline workers were interviewed.

Respondents

13 service provider interviews were conducted

4 focus groups were conducted, with 11 participants in total

Identification of Relevant Service Users, Securing Cooperation

One of the most difficult and vital aspects of data collection was securing the participation of those youth who were either currently utilizing or had at some point in the past utilized relevant services within the Camrose community service network. Although some consideration was given to the merits of poster advertising to attract volunteer participants much the way we had for service providers, the lack of direct contacts available for relevant youth required a different tactic. As a result, all focus group participants’ cooperation was attained through collaboration with serviced provider interviewees who communicated the project to their youth clients, articulated the relevance of their experience, and assisted in determining ways forward following any positive responses. Notably, because of privacy and other related concerns, only those service providers that provided group—rather than individualized—programming, were asked to consider recruiting youth clients.

Interview Format

The format of interviews was informal and conversational, guided by but not wedded to the preliminary interview tool developed. Such an approach was suited to the nature of the project, the aim of which was to get a picture of the wider Camrose community service network—a
community of perhaps dozens of organizations—which required recognizing that some interviewees were much more or much less capable of responding to some questions based on the nature and scope of their work. Interviewees were given the choice of where they were preferred their interview take place. All interviews were digitally recorded for the purpose of transcription and so were subsequently transcribed.

NOTE: Interview guides are provided in the Appendices

Focus Group Format

As suggested above, much of the decision making with regard to focus group venue and format was undertaken by the service providers themselves (as negotiated with their youth clients) based on a mutual understanding that the comfort, safety and confidentiality of the youth participants was paramount. All focus groups were conducted in the space where these participants’ regular service programming took place, while a separate room was designated for any participants who might decide at any point that they no longer wished to participate. Service providers also assisted in decisions regarding the ideal size and specific make-up of focus groups based on their own intimate sense of individual participant’s personalities, etc. All focus groups were comprised of between two and four individuals. As with the interviews discussed above, focus groups were informal and conversational, intending to give participants as much control over the flow and direction of the conversation as possible, while managing the inclusion of all participants. Each participant was given a Tim Horton’s gift card valued at twenty dollars as an expression of gratitude for their time and perspective.

PRIORITY DEMOGRAPHICS IN CAMROSE

For two reasons the results below are categorized below using demographic indicators—those groups of youth that have been identified as most underserved within the Camrose service network—rather than through direct reference to gap services themselves, which appear later. These groups can be visualized within a fractured service network that struggles to come to grips with the very differently integrated lives of those in need of services. This puts a human face (rather than a service face) to the so-called identified “gaps”, compelling readers to see services in the lives of people, rather than people in the lives of services (although the latter perspective will necessarily be a significant point of discussion). At a more practical level, two recommendations sections take up a more detailed discussion of specific service needs relevant to these demographic groups. In short, this “results section” offers the demographic findings that will then be further discussed in the more substantive “analysis” section, thereby making the more “cut-and-dry” recommendations meaningful.

This project identified six “at risk” groups in the broader Camrose community service network. As with all typologies, it is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive categories, but are overlapping and interrelated.

I. (Single) Youth with Children

Although a diverse group, these are overwhelmingly young women, not men -- all of the young parents interviewed were mothers. A general social observation, gender is a compounding force in many important ways and instances, making the experience of single mothers considerably more demanding than that of single fathers.
Although not every mother disclosed their relationship status, many were single and received neither physical (childcare, assistance in general care, household duties, etc.) nor financial (a supplemental income, if together, or child support\(^1\), if not) benefits of a partner. Some, however, did receive both. Furthermore, many of the women interviewed became pregnant at an early age, subsequently quit school, and so also face educational barriers (whether that be upgrading as a parent, or finding employment without a high school diploma).

Within Camrose this group can be considered most at risk because of their primary caretaking responsibilities (which, for all intents and purposes, were often performed alone) for one or several dependants. This amplifies both the scale and complexity of the barriers faced by them. For example, in order for a young mother to qualify for income support she must first show herself to be sufficiently employed. To do this, however, she must first find childcare so that she can work, or even begin to pursue employment at all—a challenge made doubly challenging in Camrose, where licensed childcare is limited to two day cares (both with waiting lists) and a number of day homes.\(^2\) There is also an added burden of struggling to confront and resolve an addiction and/or mental health concern knowing that childcare may be required for a number of days or even weeks as she seeks help, or the fear of having her child taken away when and if she does decide to seek this help. Even attending those appointments that (for example) don’t “require” childcare compel her to regularly commit to them with the added distraction of her role as primary caretaker. If and when childcare is secured, most of these young women do not own or have access to a vehicle (and none, notably, to public transportation) and so are subject to the additional cost of having the taxi stop at the daycare centre on their way to work, adding several dollars to an already disproportionately costly daily service.

Access to housing—both short- and long-term—is perhaps the most significant barrier being faced by this sub-population. Landlord discrimination ranks high as a shared experience among these women, and several young mothers cite sheer “luck” as their primary ally in finding housing at an affordable rate. While some have local familial support (often parents or grandparents), many do not, either because of preexisting and/or ongoing family discord, or geographical distance. In terms of formal housing assistance options, there are very few. The Open Door does not provide a suitable, secure space to host these women, making even emergency housing out of reach aside from that which is provided by the women’s shelter (whose focus is domestic abuse and violence). Certainly some of these women have and can find support at the women’s shelter, but it is by no means an option for all. Programs that do offer options like rent supplement, affordable or low-income housing are not geared to the single individual or single-parent family and are subject to lengthy wait times due to a lack of availability.

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\(^1\) Whether or not such financial contributions make a meaningful difference to a mother on income support is disputable. Any financial contribution from the father is discounted dollar-for-dollar from that provided by income support. In one instance, while the predetermined monthly amount of money to be paid by the father was deducted from income support, the father did not provide his share. Characteristic of this demographic—perched on razors edge of precarity as they often are—she was chose to bridge the months financial gap through a payday loan, for which she was understandably regretful.

\(^2\) Fees for full-time day care are $775 and $700 per month, or $45/$40 per day. Day homes are $625/month full-time.
Consider the perspective of one service provider when asked about the availability of housing for this demographic: “[I]t’s not available. If you’re...a single parent...if you’re looking for a one bedroom single...a one bedroom home for those types here, there’s really nothing available in our world, from social housing for those types of families”. Once again, the “chicken and egg” problematic compels these women to have one or the other of stable housing and/or employment before they can access social supports. Age also factors into this equation.

II. Youth Under Eighteen Years of Age
Some of the youth encountered were under eighteen years of age, and almost none of the formal social support services available to those over the age of eighteen. For mothers experiencing irresolvable family conflict, for example, or who had no local familial social support because of geographic or other barriers, this is experienced with the most impact. The Open Door, again, is not an option for this sub-group, and the women’s shelter remains circumscribed by its mandate and, at times, space limitations.

As legal dependants without the option to stay at home, they are unable to pursue any of the formal housing assistance services such as Support for Independence (SFI), rent supplement and affordable or low-income housing, and have little luck persuading landlords to rent to them, even with cash in hand (largely because, in the midst of family conflict, few avenues are available to pursued a willing co-signer). Similarly, these youth are ineligible for any of the employment support pathways provided by Alberta Works.

Youth below the age of eighteen—and especially those between the ages of 15 and 18—were disproportionately placed within the services network to receive basic support. Provincial services mandated to support this group exhibited a consistent reluctance to engage with and assist youth who are over the age of fifteen though not yet eighteen, although some interviewees did indicate that this reluctance starts much earlier and could characterize the experience of junior high and high school-age students.

In terms of emergency housing—and more recently some degree of long-term or transitional housing—the Open Door has, by overwhelming consensus, had enormous impact on this youth demographic. This benefit not only includes a safe, secure and stable place to stay, but also a number of other widely praised services, such as in-house counseling and therapy. This “one-stop-shopping” model that so distinguishes the Open Door was widely praised for its profound impact on youths lives in Camrose.

III. Parents and Guardians
There is a widespread conviction among a great deal of service providers that if one is genuinely interested in reaching out to youth, there must be some recognition that the family unit—parents and guardians—are important.

Although the intergenerational aspects of the youth-parent interface were front and centre, some concern was raised with respect to parents who—while financially and emotionally stable—do struggle with a high-need youth who may be harmful to themselves or others but have exhausted the capability of the family to provide and cope with these needs. Notably, Unit 3 (the psychiatric ward) in St. Mary’s Hospital does not accept youth under the age of eighteen.
IV. First Nations Youth
As a regional, economic and social service hub, Camrose’s proximity to Hobbema has a considerable impact on the nature of the problems faced by service providers here. It is also well known that within Camrose, the women’s shelter that experiences this proximity most profoundly, with over sixty percent of its clientele being First Nations women, many of them with children. As always, intersectional identities are at play, compounding experiences of discrimination and alienation. This generates serious concerns about how welcome they and their children feel in Camrose. The number of women making the decision to leave Hobbema has increased dramatically in the last four years.

Recognizing the everyday realities of life in Hobbema—extreme poverty, domestic violence, gang violence, trauma and PTSD, addictions, incest—there is a critical observation to be made of those who are choosing to leave, and therein a remarkable opportunity for those service providers willing to engage with it. One service provider describes the relevant trend:

[W]e’re finding that a lot of the women are leaving. The men aren’t leaving, the women are leaving. They’re leaving their community, they’re leaving their culture, they’re leaving their people, they’re leaving their families, their grandparents, they’re leaving everything, and they’re saying, ‘we need to do better’.

V. Youth Over Twenty-Four Years of Age
Given that the Open Door is mandated to service youth between the ages of eleven/sixteen to twenty-four, however, service availability after this age is both an emergency and long-term housing and support service question. Several service providers as well as a number of young mothers raised concerns over the lack of readily available services for this demographic. One young woman recounted her unsuccessful attempt to evict her partner from their shared residence, citing among the barriers to successfully accomplishing this the fact that he had no place to go.

VI. Extreme Instances of Marginalization
Concerns for highly marginalized youth were voiced from a variety of perspectives. These youth were characterized as “hardened” as a result of their experiences within the criminal justice system, but also empowered by their ability to “manipulate” its functions—as well as those of other social services and social services processes—in ways that are not necessarily to their own long-term benefit. They very likely embody more complex “layers” of negative experiences and subsequently confront more and higher barriers to housing than most. They may also engage in more risky behavior than most. This behavior may be exacerbated by the fact that they are not in

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This means that over 240 clients of the women’s shelter annually, are First Nations Peoples.

“One of the things that is very noticeable in communities that have been crushed and are barely surviving is that the women seem much more able to do things than men are. And you can see why. The women’s responsibilities continue no matter how rotten the situation. They’re still taking care of the children, doing all the housework, cooking. Often men, when their usual opportunities are gone, are lost. They have nothing to do. They turn to drink, to crime. You see it all over the place” (Chomsky, 84).
school, and so may spend their days “roaming the streets” while also remaining unaware of the services or supports that they would otherwise, at the very least, brush up against (schools are, importantly, the most significant “hubs” for youth-parent-service interaction). They may also be considerably more disinclined than others to access the services provided by, for example, the Open Door, where there are behavioral rules and restrictions with which one must abide in order to take advantage of them, as well as a population of other youth that may not share the extremities of their experiences.

Those of very high need (e.g. those who exhibit suicidal or violent behavior), as stated, may not be able to access an unsecured facility such as the Open Door, while Unit 3 remains unavailable to those under eighteen years of age. If they do access shelter services such as those provided by the Open Door, their willingness to engage in the breadth of services offered may be circumscribed due to repeated (negative) past experiences with authority figures such as therapists or counselors.

SERVICE PROVISION AND NEEDS

A Complex Service Landscape

I. Multi-Layered

This was a sentiment shared by many service providers. Whereas previously service providers would regularly tackle situations with perhaps two layers, the perception is that the complexity of problems and barriers being faced by marginalized groups has become the norm. Parental and youth mental health, family breakdown and parent-child conflict, educational barriers, domestic physical and sexual violence, substance abuse, FASD, joblessness and underemployment are all showing themselves to be a far more routine part of peoples’ lives in Camrose, and in even greater numbers and combinations. The increasing acceptability of using prescription drugs as a coping mechanism, for example, has allowed many women to stay in unhealthy or violent relationships significantly longer. As a result, the trauma and mental health repercussions are exacerbated for these women, as well as for their dependants. Exacerbating the sense of hopelessness experienced by many in recent years is their confrontation with—as one service provider articulated it—“layers upon layers of problems”.

II. Multi-Generational

Embedded within the layers discussed above are obvious intergenerational concerns. As one service provider articulates, “It’s not just one problem, it’s not just the problem of homelessness, it’s not just the problem of addictions, it’s not just the problem of family violence, it’s the whole family and what’s happening in the family.” A second service provider details this observation:

[W]e’re having family meetings where we have a biological dad, a stepdad, biological mom, stepmom, grandmother, and then there maybe another stepparent who still has connection. But this is not a group that’s talking to one another, or working with one another...its much more complex…because everybody else has their own problems.
The observation that “everybody else has their own problems” is an important one, allowing us to highlight, once again, that although there are direct links between a parent’s stability and that of their dependants (e.g. parent-youth conflict), those that might be understood as somewhat more indirect (e.g. parental mental health, addiction, literacy) are similarly impactful on youth well-being and intergenerational marginalization.

III. Multi-Temporal
Marginalized groups experience challenges and barriers that require a long-term/life-long perspective in order to make a reasonable assessment not only about their current needs. This is also necessary for the issues at play here run the gamut from socialization, mentorship and life-skills building to emergency, transitional and independent but still supported housing options. Other temporal concerns such as those associated with the rise of so-called “flexible labor” (emerging in Camrose following the mid-2000 west end development) have serious implications for those living lives of precarity—the so-called “working poor”—who are most likely to be employed in this way. They must find the time to work several jobs, accept atypical work schedules and investigate their eligibility for any social supports that might be available to them, while also managing the demands that come with child-care or other responsibilities. Notably, these time constraints are exacerbated by the fact that many services are only available to them during the “typical” work-week, Monday to Friday, 8:30am-4:30pm. Time in the lives of marginalized groups cannot be overlooked.

IV. Multi-Spatial
As much as poverty, homelessness and discrimination are deeply implicated with issues of time and temporality, so too are space and spatiality. Spatial issues in the context of marginalization can be represented on any number of scales and in any number of contexts. At the most basic level, marginalized groups in Camrose have great difficulty moving around at reasonable cost, whether to work or, in the context of service provision, to the variously located service locations available to them. Both service providers and service users were unanimous and outspoken on the issue of public transportation in Camrose, and the disproportionate impact of this lack on these groups.

Space also has important expressions within an economic context. For example, Alberta has attracted many Canadians from great distances, some of whom have unexpectedly found themselves struggling to get by, but without the local support systems available to others. Others—youth—may find that, for reasons outside of their own control, their parents must travel for work and so spend significant amounts of time fend for themselves free from the direct care, concern or authority of a parent. Finally, an important set of very distinct changes have taken place within the global political economy in recent decades, with deep implication for policymaking and social service provision in Alberta.

V. Identity Intersectionality: Age, Sex, Race and Class
As demonstrated most clearly in the discussion of (1) First Nations youth; and (2) youth with children in the results section, experiences of marginalization—besides being class-based—are always heavily raced and gendered (and, as indicated by those over the age of
twenty-four in Camrose, aged). Feelings of social alienation in the face of moral judgment, as well as a sense of being unwelcome, lesser, unworthy and burdensome are common. Unsurprisingly, embarrassment, stigma and discrimination were frequently cited as reasons why those needing help in Camrose might choose not to pursue it. Importantly, accounts of this sort are often linked to government policies that invoke precisely these sentiments of guilt and shame.

Before arriving at any determination of a response to this question, however, it must be clarified what is meant by “holistic” and “integrated”, as well as why such a recognition is important at all. Both are concepts that express something important about how one comes to understand and articulate the nature of social groups as well as how they relate to the larger world, and to change. Such a grasp is particularly important in cases such as those at issue here, where vulnerable or marginalized groups interact with a similarly complex world of service providers who will necessarily intervene in their lives some way. Both concepts share a certain quality of observation—a conviction—that things exist in a context.

Provider-Focused: Mandates
Recognizing that there are many, many issues that complicate a discussion such as this one, we should begin at the most basic level, by underscoring an observation made by many in the course of data collection, by some explicitly and others implicitly—the issue of service mandates. On this topic roughly two “camps” were identified, with organizations fitting variously within them (some far more solidly in one than others, and most perhaps somewhere in-between):

a. “Doing It All”
Here it was observed that some organizations were attempting to “do it all”—appearing at times to effectively have no mandate at all, as one service provider put it—at the expense of communicating their intentions in a way that allows other service providers to effectively interact or work with that mandate for the good of the community. In this context, issues of efficiency, service duplication and an unclear competition for funding were raised. It was indicated that while “doing it all” was not in and of itself unconstructive (as stated, the Open Door was widely praised for its “one-stop-shop” model), the result was to spread limited resources too thinly, negatively impacting both services workers, and on service provision. The Open Door was the organization that can be said to fit most squarely within this category, though it is important to note that this is not wholly negative.

b. Restrictive “Silos”
At the opposite end of the spectrum, organizations with the “silo” designation were either simply “hard-edged”—keen to “police” the boundaries of their mandates—or, much worse, actively and deliberately involved in crafting their mandates and qualification criteria so narrowly, or in some cases their application processes so overwhelmingly, that many were both restricted and discouraged access to the services offered. Government services fit within this category more
so than any others. Importantly, this may create gaps *between* mandates whereby “unqualified” candidates in need of services may fall through the cracks established by heavily policed service mandates that are not integrated with, or bridged by, others.

**User-Focused: Physical and Intellectual Service Accessibility**

While perhaps understood as an “efficiency” issue because of the potential for both under- and over-designated services,\(^5\) there are user-focused reasons to explore mandate philosophies and inter-agency cooperation. The considerations of this nature expressed by service providers were linked to both physical and intellectual accessibility.

The physical or spatial aspect is rather simple to articulate, though significantly more difficult to systematically overcome. With tens of service providers in Camrose—many of which require regular appointments to which one must travel—the expense incurred by taxi fares is a considerable barrier to consistently making these engagements. Furthermore, the difficulty of visiting several, distinctly mandated services in different locations, determining whether or not you qualify for those services, telling your “story”, and providing and completing the necessary paperwork can be intimidating and demoralizing. It was often these basic logistics that were most widely cited as the most significant barriers to service access (though it must be mentioned that many community-based service providers regularly assisted their clients with these aspects).

One provider expressed concern over the degree to which they themselves could expect those seeking services to think in a long-term and integrated way about their own life when the service community did not itself reflect that quality. Another was concerned that, because youth may receive different “messages” about ways forward from different service providers, they were subject to being pulled in different directions, creating confusion or, allowing them to choose the direction that appeals to them most.

There are potential concerns for those “doing it all” as well; spreading a limited budget too widely carries the risk of a decline in the quality or “depth” of the services being provided. It was mentioned that the Open Door has been losing several high quality and well-respected employees in recent years, arguing also that their workers are significantly underpaid for the difficulty, intensity and quality of their work. Because organizations such as the Open Door rely heavily on the quality of these individuals for its reputation among its youth clientele, such turn over can be a dangerous threat to its long-term identity and reputation:

> [Y]outh aren’t going to pay attention to what’s in the papers, they’re not going to pay attention to what’s on the radio, it’s going to be the one on one contact, it’s going to be you know, ‘hey I just saw so and so at the Open Door, they’re really actually a cool person maybe you can benefit’.

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\(^5\) The former resulting in those in need being left behind and so under threat of further marginalization and increased future care, and the latter resulting in unnecessary, wasteful reproduction whose resources would be better used for precisely those falling through the gaps.
Open Door staff were the subject of considerable praise for the quality of their work though, again, the sustainability of this in light of compensation issues remains at play.

One of the things for which the Open Door was widely commended (and where some government services dismally faltered) was its visibility in the community, in large part a result of the quality and commitment of their outreach team. Many service providers argued that giving youth the opportunity to “observe” service workers was a key building the trust that might compel them to seek help. If you do not reach out as an organization, you remain invisible and intimidating, giving the impression among youth that their accessing your services is burdensome. Furthermore, it is through the tact of skilled outreach workers who can articulate what they do, not in a clinical sense, but rather in terms meaningful to their potential youth clientele, that this can be done. Youth likely do not know what “mental health” is, or how the technical nature of your service has relevance to the personal proximity of his or her particular struggles. Schools, however, remain a space where the Open Door and others must systematically engage in in order to do this.

Service providers were, broadly speaking, satisfied with the level of inter-agency cooperation achieved in Camrose with the Open Door being considered among those most capable, most willing and most engaged in these activities. Some service providers argued that, compared to many other communities, the level of inter-agency collaboration was quite well developed in Camrose. It was also suggested that the major barriers to seriously and fundamentally changing the landscape of the Camrose community service network rest on the much more substantive and impactful political considerations or bottlenecks. In this way, the following expression of the nature and degree of current and possible coordination within the Camrose service network (Figure 1.1)—as well as the recommendations that follow it—will not be wholly relevant until we have considered the full scope of these issues in the discussion that follows.
**Figure 1.1**  Current and Possible Service Coordination in Camrose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Interaction</th>
<th>Nature of Interaction</th>
<th>Features of Interaction (e.g.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>ad hoc; oriented toward individuals and individual case files; contextually circumscribed, perhaps inspired by an “emergency” or other acute circumstances</td>
<td>case conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>somewhat systematic; long-term thinking where possible; an awareness and ability to engage context, such as familial conflict; a broad number and variety of relevant service organizations have establish patterns, plans, recognized circumstances and particular relevant resources for cooperation with which to engage particular others.</td>
<td>Working together to create service plans that show temporal and contextual awareness. Service workers with relevant skills from one organization may offer their services to another on a systematic, prescheduled basis (i.e. mobile service provision).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Systematic and integrated with large numbers of relevant or “core” service participants</td>
<td>An appropriately funded city social planner whose role it is to coordinate services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

As Figure 1.1 suggests, while there are some initiatives that can arguably be undertaken independently among service providers—such as that listed first, below—many are already engaged. The more substantive recommendations that show the most promise toward reaching a high degree of service coordination, however, are more far reaching. They also require the engagement of the City of Camrose, and Camrose City Council.

I. **Systematic School Outreach:** Service providers must be actively engaged with student populations and administrations, keeping in mind the relevance of the discussion about intellectual accessibility, above. This is perhaps more important than ever in light of the dramatic cutbacks in Family School Liaison Workers (currently there are only four working within the entire Battle River School Division).

Schools can and should be understood as a “hub” of sorts—one of the few existing venues wherein both youth and their parents or guardians can be “legitimately” brought together. While teachers and school administrators can provide the physical location for potentially engagement with families, service providers have the complementary opportunity to provide the skills and tools to make this engagement meaningful to both schools staff and students. As one interviewee argued, “you don’t just become homeless…it’s a process”, and teachers must be taught what signs of trouble to look for. Notably, the CHAMP Program exists to administer and facilitate just such relationships, and so is a significant asset in this regard.

II. **Public Transportation:** The need for public transportation in Camrose was raised by nearly every single service provider and service user. This lack is exacerbated by the spatial disparity of service providers, particularly for those, such as young mothers, who may not have a driver’s license (even if a car was affordable), family or spousal support or the easy and affordable access to childcare that, weather permitting, might allow them...
to walk (an activity that takes up a considerable amount of time, which is a luxury not as readily available to some as to others). The responsibility for this falls squarely on the city, whose lack of initiative on this account was the frustration of all service providers interviewed:

[I would like to] challenge city council to go…you know, go without your car for a week, and get to where you have to go; but your friends don’t have cars either! And you have no money for a cab. And it’s January. Just see how easy it is to get around this town…when you have places to go and things you have to do, and then your [sic] required to get a job, well you gotta take your kid to daycare, and then you gotta go to your employment, and then you gotta go pick your kid up from daycare.

It was mentioned by another participant that perhaps the only really visible indication of poverty in Camrose was being asked for a ride. Certainly it was the routine of many service providers to drive clients to their appointments at the expense of the organization, perhaps contributing to the illusion that public transportation is not needed. In any case, for those living precariously, the cost savings accrued through the existence of public transportation in Camrose would be substantial, and for single mothers would likely contribute to both their and their children’s nutritional well-being, for example, so taking pressure off of the food bank.

III. City Social Planner: Another widely held conviction among service providers is the serious need for a city social planner. As with transportation, this is a long-standing request of the service community, the realization of which falls squarely on the City. Pointing out the ineffectiveness of the existing extra-municipal Interagency body as a serious integrative body capable of serious social planning, one service provider offers this:

Who’s in charge of this, like, who would be in charge of actually connecting people up if…it’s not my job to try to line up…No one’s looking after this, right? No one…it’s no one…people get paid to do this job and it’s not…it’s not, like, individual charity directors or the economic development officer or the mayor…There needs to be someone delegated to be leading this integration. We need a social planner. End of story. Then that would be the point person on a study like this. The liaison between the 57 charities and city council, it would be a way of having an effective standing committee of city council develop…or that was working on social development issues.

Implied here is that such a planner would have to be sufficiently mandated and funded so as not to suffer the fate of the existing Social Development Committee which, while overflowing with a knowledgeable and well intentioned membership, is given no funding with which to carry out its plans. On the issue of available funds—an argument made by the city in protest against hiring such a planner—one service provider offered the following lucid retort:
And they say there’s no money, there’s no money, there’s no money. Bullshit, there’s money for lots of things. There’s money for the golf course to lose money hand over fist, every year, there’s money…Golf course loses tens, and tens and tens of thousands of dollars every year. And, yeah, we can’t keep food in the food bank.

Nor can the reluctance be considered a lack or readily available skill. One existing city employee in particular was singled out as an illustration of someone well qualified to undertake the task of social planner.

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF HOMELESSNESS IN CAMROSE

Many who could be (or, more specifically, should be) considered “major players” within the social service network in Camrose are very noticeably either not interested in substantive, considered involvement, or are inspired by—or, more properly, beholden to—a very different “social service philosophy” or modus operandi: (1) elements of those social services provided and or managed by the provincial government; (2) the City of Camrose (discussed above) and; (3) the private sector and, more specifically, the business community within Camrose.

1) The City of Camrose

The City of Camrose was considered, by consensus, a significant “outsider” within the Camrose social service network. The city’s disinterest in social planning has already been noted, but the “background” of this detachment as expressed by interviewees has not.

Described on more than one occasion as an “old boys club”, the City of Camrose has historically marketed itself so heavily, in terms so narrow—as a beautiful, sleepy rural retirement community—that the perception of its socio-demographic characteristics among the larger community appears to have been influenced. The population of both youth and young people (over thirty percent) as well as those best working in low-income jobs (thirty percent) is considerable:

When I went to work in this job, I was absolutely astounded that there’s this ‘underbelly’ in this community…where there is all of the young people who are in such dire straights. You know, they’ve got nowhere to live, they’re addicted to drugs, they’re, you know, and I never…I would not have known or thought that possible about this community. It’s a very beautiful community; everything looks nice and clean.

People are not nearly as “plugged in” to this rural community as is popularly imagined, as another interviewee points out. Fortunately, it was also acknowledged that movement has been made on this front, in large part because of the Open Door’s very public persona:

I think the Open Door has done a really good job making themselves known and making the need known in the community that we have a problem with youth and homelessness. It’s not a secret anymore; this isn’t a pretty little community with the swans and the lake.

Yet the city’s focus remains on real estate and economic development and, as one interviewee remarked, “they’re not in the business of social service support”. As a result,
their primary indicators of success from year to year—the number of building permits granted, for example—reflect these values. Such a focus on economic development illustrates an important point--the market is cast as the primary source of individual well-being while the role of the state is confined to enhancing these markets to “increase self-sufficiency and labor force participation” among marginalized populations (Brodie 170). One service provider puts the poverty of this logic into context:

[W]hen they built the west end in 2004 and they created you know all those block stores and probably brought 1,200 jobs to Camrose they probably said to themselves okay let’s look at the social aspect of this, do we have appropriate housing nah not really but you know…Okay so they go okay do we have Oscar which is an after school care program, yes we do. Do we have a Boys and Girls Club because these are low income jobs, yes we do. Alright we’ve done our social piece. You know did they address…you know we’ve been trying to get bussing in this community, we’re big enough and you know did they look at that, well that’s not really important people can walk you know. See now a social planner would say well okay we do have a Boys and Girls Club but is he prepared for another 200 children to come into his program, maybe we should go ask him hey would that be cool…A social planner would think about that stuff, a social planner would say well is there anything you know for affordable housing coming into this…[W]e build those block stores it makes our community look great but we don’t really think about the social infrastructure to handle it.

Another interviewee—a sitting City Councilor—makes a complementary remark, pushing the argument further:

[W]ith the new economic development work that’s being done in the City, one of the arguments that I make is that not all economic development is good social development. If all we’re doing is bringing in hospitality and retail jobs at minimum wage, you’re…bringing in a set of parents where both parents have to hold two jobs in order to make ends meet. So you got all of the childcare issues that go with that. Or if they’re youth, you create youth at risk because they’re home alone and unguided, unprotected, as the case may be. So…sometimes economic development becomes, in my mind, social disaster (emphasis added).

2) The Private Sector and Business Community

The criticisms of market-based solutions expressed above fundamentally changes the frame of the issues at play: the business community can now be understood as not simply providing straightforward social goods—offering jobs and therefore the primary source of individual wellbeing and self-sufficiency—but instead as beneficiaries of such developments with serious responsibilities well beyond those traditionally assumed. The emphasis on “individual responsibility”, rather than, for example, the structural
displacement of particular groups of people (a concern also related to the neoliberal orientation of government social services) must be shed:

[N]ot all the employers but I would say a vast majority of employers are just not aware of just don’t care about the youth issues in Camrose. I mean, they just … you know, they [youth] should be responsible for their own actions.

During the interview period, the input regarding the private sector appeared in two, broad categories, although specific others, such as payday lenders, were singled out as particularly predatory:

The first group were those concerned with employer’s and their (un)willingness to hire visibly marginalized applicants or advocate for those they’d already hired, observing also their potential to contribute through training and preparing these groups (see results section) for employment, arming them with skills related directly and indirectly to employability:

[T]he employer community [is] just not understanding that some of youth have some significant barriers to employment…And so they are very reluctant…to actually bring some of those kids on board to give them a chance for a job…So rather than hire them they’ll just …they won’t…And then they’ll bring in somebody else, because…they feel that the risk is not worth the effort.

Although comments made in this vein were varied all of them expressed the potential for some movement on the issue.

I think one area that we’re not tapping into enough…is the business community of Camrose. I think service providers are usually on the same page and get where we’re working towards. I wouldn’t say that business necessarily is as aware or as open to things…[M]aybe the understanding of the impact that, say, homelessness is having on their employees. And so what could they do to support that? Or even hiring a student that may look a little dodgy but will actually be a great employee for you. So I think there’s areas in that that need to be kind of addressed. And some are good, but I would say that for the most part that’s kind of an area that’s untouched.

A second set of comments concerned landlord roles in the context of marginalized groups (see results section). Comments made here spanned the spectrum from the observed discrimination faced by these groups similar to that seen among employers—wherein landlords refuse to rent to them under any circumstances—to those “slum landlords” who preyed upon these same groups, profiting from their vulnerability and desperation (as a result of having few other options) by offering them insecure, substandard and overpriced housing options. Regarding the latter, Jamieson Manor was instructive as a model:
[A]ll of a sudden [landlords] had, you know, 75-80 people moving out of their apartments and now they’ve got vacancies…So what they had to do is some of them…there was some renovations that took place in some of them and all of a sudden the rents went from $950 a month to $650 because their vacancy rates were 50-60 percent…So they had to clean up the buildings, they had to provide better security, they had to lower the rents.

As with employers, landlords may need to be more systematically engaged by the serve community in order to make them more meaningful actors in improving lives of marginalized populations in Camrose. Relevant ideas put forward in responding to these and other matters discussed within this report are put forth in the following, final recommendations section.

BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

A variety of reasons were voiced as to why service providers of various strips might not be cooperative to the extent that they could be, or show themselves to be disinterested in it. Because these reasons are highly circumscribed in that they do not take into account the far more substantive “political” issues discussed in the next section, it is sufficient to acknowledge them here in list-form. As is the case with all typologies, they are incomplete, overlapping and unable to account for the complexity of the lived world:

a. **Protectionism:** this attitude suggests a flavor of service “ownership”, or a sense of having or needing control and authority over the administration of a particular clientele, which may also be linked to “policed” mandates.

b. **Convictions of a “correct way”:** Related to the above descriptor, this sentiment is based on the assumption that control over a particular clientele allows the organization to implement their services and intervention strategies on their own, in the “correct way”.

c. **Fear of joblessness:** The links to a serious restructuring of service provision in Camrose (discussed below) is at play here, as one service provider articulates: “Well, it’s like…it’s like when a consultant enters a work place, everyone…the knee-jerk reaction is I’m going to get fired, lose my job…We [as service providers, generally] fear change, and loss of control, more than anything, perhaps”.

d. **The “earned” office and a fear of outreach:** The competitive nature of professional—often government—jobs in Alberta has numerous, not unexpected implications, among them the tendency to view the hard-won title and office as earned workspaces. The necessity of “towing the line” as you engage in your work is reinforced by both the threat of job loss in a competitive political context under constant threat of “restructuring”, as well as the opportunity and allure of climbing the bureaucratic ladder once in. Furthermore, those newly trained in these positions may have little filed experience, perhaps in unfamiliar contexts compared to that which they find themselves, and as a result they possess a fear of leaving the office comparable to those clients who fear entering it!
e. **FOIP, information sharing and red tape:** This is fairly straightforward. Many organizations cannot, as one might hope, simply call up a relevant counterpart and begin sharing information and service planning. The alternative to this—the act of a simple unsupported referral—often fails.

**FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS: FILLING THE CRACKS**

I. **Parental Education, Support and Skill-Development:** Parents need their own support groups, as well as education and skill-development programs. Importantly, these are needs not exclusive to young parents, particularly mothers, but also for those families that, while still intact and even relatively stable, may have a teen that is starting to couch-surf, or a child with ADHD or FASD with whom they are experiencing difficulty communicating or controlling. In this way they are oriented toward prevention—building resilience as a way to avoid the development of emergencies—as much as they are to the possibility of bringing families back into conversation. These programs should emphasize participation and skill building, as well as imply the significance of identifying strengths as much as any weaknesses. Attitudes toward alcohol and other drug use—both in the context of how parents discuss it with their kids as well as conceptualize their own consumptive habits—were offered as important topics to engage, as were coping with emotional distress, conflict resolution strategies, literacy, employment and employability skills, job searching, housekeeping, meal preparation and budgeting. Existing programs for young mothers in particular were extolled unanimously by their participants, with many arguing that these were among the few meaningful supports for them in Camrose.

II. **Childcare:** Particularly because of the kind of work that the majority of marginalized groups were likely to be involved in—food service, hospitality and retail, many characterized by the necessity of working “flexible” hours—childcare, and particularly after-hours childcare, was voiced as a critical need in Camrose. Importantly, this issue is not limited to those employed in these industries alone, however disproportionate the cost of childcare may be to them. One service provider offered the following:

I went to a forum—a social forum here in Camrose—to discuss what kind of social issues do we have in Camrose, and how are we going to handle them. The number one issue was “after-hours childcare”. These are people that are middle-upper class people that are saying this. This isn’t our poor, poverty-stricken…people that are coming there…This is, like, middle- to upper-class people all sittin’ around talking about issues, and that’s the issue. Why is that an issue? Because we have nurses in Camrose like crazy…homecare nurses…the Rosehaven…like all the lodges.

III. **Youth Education and Skill Development, Mentorship, Recreation and Day Programming:** Similar to that which has been expressed above as a serious need for parents, youth need skills through which they can envision and realize the possibility of change and stability aside from that which is strictly physical, such as provided by housing. Topics to engage include addictions and healthy habits, coping with emotional distress, conflict resolution strategies, literacy and education for employment, employment and employability skills, maintaining a job, job searching, meal preparation, housekeeping and budgeting.

Programs are needed geared toward guiding youth toward the realization of stability, trust and belonging through social and personal capacity building. They must be made to feel connected to
something around which an identity can be shaped, and in which they can feel comfortable and capable investing value. These, then, are not services as much as community engagement initiatives, but can maintain elements of traditional skill building. Provide a meal, perhaps, and advertise widely. Creative attempts need to be made to reach those that may not be attending school. With the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program no longer operational in Camrose, a significant gap remains to be filled that offers youth formal avenues to consistently connect with role models and mentors. Citing the importance of trust among marginalized youth, one interviewee argued that it was not enough to offer straightforward mentorship options, suggesting instead that serious attempts need to be made to connect struggling youth with those who have had similar life experiences but are now stabilized.

IV. Workplace Programs and Employer Involvement Initiatives: Aside from one interviewee, nobody had yet seriously considered how this might be done in any detail. As a relatively “untouched” area of concern, some coordinated discussion on how relevant organizations might approach the business community is recommended. Observing a possible lack of awareness on the part of the business community suggests that detailing to them the struggles of relevant youth, as well as the continued growth of food service, retail and hospitality jobs in the face of few social supports, might be a reasonable start.

[D]o an advertising campaign in the papers and just talk about, you know, this is what…these are some of the youth that are looking for work. You know…do sort of like little Johnny…you know, do sort of like a profile of Johnny, this is his skills, he’s looking for a job, you know, and you talk about all the services and programs, and the good things that Open Door and other agencies that work with these do with kids, eh?...And then try to convince…you know, convince some employers to actually take on some of these kids and just give them a chance…[The] Open Door can’t afford to take that on themselves. To do an advertising and educational campaign…takes a lot of money, it’s a lot of work.

Conveying to employers that these youth do have important supports in place such as those provided by the Open Door provides a conveys a certain confidence to potential employers, but also suggests that service providers cannot do it alone—a sense that the success of these youth is a shared responsibility between the social service community, the business community, and the youth themselves.

Alberta Works was brought up on several occasions as a distinct concern, and was described as evasive, unaccountable and inconsistent with regard to accessing its services, with none of these services being available to youth under the age of eighteen. Concerned about recent cutbacks to Alberta Works, one interviewee had the following to say:

So if you’re a 23 year old young male who hasn’t been able to find a job in three months, and is already working with Alberta Mental Health because you’ve got some significant mental health issues, and you’ve got some familial issues with your family and you’ve got…you know, you end up at the Open Door, and you’re staying in their shelter and you’ve…you’ve got no money and you go down to Alberta Works and [they] say, “Well, you go…you go get a full-time job and then come back and talk to us,” when the fact…actual reality of the fact is, is that this guy probably isn’t that employable, so…to market a guy like that is very difficult.
V. Men’s Shelter and/or Emergency Housing for Men Over Twenty-Four Years Old: This was a recommendation made by service providers and service users alike. Although the Open Door had made a tremendous impact on the issue of youth homelessness in Camrose, its mandate does not accommodate men over the age of twenty-four. Taking a long-term perspective, this need has direct relevance to the complementary need for transitional housing in Camrose for both men and women.

VI. Transitional Housing: One service provider plainly conveys the wider sentiment: “[W]hat we’re really missing here—and I hear this all the time—is forms of transitional housing”. Precisely what forms are not always well articulated, perhaps because transitional housing is “such a hard thing to invest in” because as one service provider put it, there is “[n]o economic model for it. You tell me who pays for it”. The broader recognition, expectedly, was that if emergency housing is going to be more than a “band-aid” solution, and if we are going to move beyond a situation in which those utilizing it are in a permanent state of crises, it follows that these services must be made to be part of a larger, long-term planning model.

It is largely an issue of making existing emergency services—the Women’s Shelter and Open Door in particular—more meaningful and impactful. Expectedly, any long-term planning in this regard is stifled by lack of interest, but also by unpredictable, short-term government funding horizons. In any case, there was a general “philosophical” consensus among service providers that something akin to the “Housing First” model, was desirable. Here, providing independent living arrangements to marginalized individuals deemed ready is an important step in providing the physical and intellectual stability wherein regularized patterns of life and the possibility of skill building (e.g. cooking, cleaning, stocking a refrigerator, paying for utilities) can take place. The Open Door seems to have made an important step in this direction with its new transitional housing units, though not all interviewees were yet aware of these developments.

Appropriate housing (or other options) for working class families who, while regularly stable, may have fallen on a hard month or two—perhaps faced with unexpected expenses—and require a “stop-gap” for restabilization, were indicated as needing development. Similar options were indicated as needed by, for example, young mothers who are faced with unexpected shortfalls in their month’s budget or are experiencing an intractable family conflict, or are pregnant and only months away from qualifying for government income support. In these cases, the objective is to provide the necessary reinforcements so as to rescue those that, while not in need of large-scale interventions, are at risk of needing them if they go unassisted.

VII. Emergency Addictions “Detox” Centre: This was straightforwardly suggested as a need for those who may be picked up by the police, and for whatever reason are unable to be accommodated by any of the existing emergency resources. The concern is that after being turned away, these individuals only option is to spend the night in the “drunk tank”, subsequently returning to the unhealthy situation from which they came. With the wait times for Addictions and Mental Health Services as they are (1-4 weeks in cases), a small, short-term facility to stabilize and house these individuals offers them the opportunity to receive the space, time, and guidance necessary to make decisions about the longer-term options available to them.

VIII. 24-Hour Crisis Response Team: This is an important issue in that it responds to a common concern among service providers that the vast majority of services provided to youth was only available from 8:30-4:30, and therefore do not always integrate well with the lives of
youth. This need for a crisis response team in particular was brought up by one service provider who had indicated that while Camrose used to have such a team—staffed by an interdisciplinary membership, including social workers and nurses—it was discontinued because it was thought to duplicate a 1-800 number provided by Alberta Health Services in Ponoka. The problem is that youth are reluctant to call “random” help-lines such as this. Importantly, the Open Door does have a 24-hour outreach helpline with the capability of physical response though, in light of the above, there is some indication that it needs to be more widely advertised.

**IX. Rural Awareness of Services and Regularized, Sustained Outreach to Schools:** Although those issues concerning intellectual barriers to youth access to services have been discussed, it remains to be said that there was concern among some service providers that youth outside of Camrose may not be as aware of the services available to them as those living here, nor would they be as accessible to them. There is potential to include these youth among those considered most underserved within the Camrose community service network (see results section), though this is largely the result of geographical and accessibility barriers rather than a concrete lack of available services, such as is the case with young mothers, for example. Under these circumstances, outreach in this area should be considered and explored. Perhaps this is a demographic to which the 24-hour outreach helpline offered by the Open Door could be heavily advertised.

Also unclear was the extent to which organizations—and particularly the Open Door—were making the effort at regular and sustained school outreach, although there were some indications that more could be done in this respect. One such instance is offered:

> [W]e can’t negate the role of the parents in these situations. Some kids don’t have parents, but most of them do, right?...So that would be something. And I think...I know that until this year the admin at the [Composite High School] had never met with Randal, so that was something that we kind of facilitated. So I think maybe the administration knows but maybe the teachers don’t know. So is there a role there? Could we...you know, could they come to a full-on admin meeting that is held every year...

Also implied here is that school outreach is particularly important in light of the observations made in the context of the results section where parents were identified as an important underserved group, as well as the first recommendation section above, where schools were argued to be a rare “hub” wherein the overwhelming problem of parent-child conflict might be confronted.

**X: Toward Service Sharing and a “One-Stop-Shopping” Model:** In spite of the widespread recognition that interagency collaboration in Camrose was not ideal, far fewer than made this observation put forth concrete suggestions of how this shortfall might be overcome. One very straightforward suggestion, however, was offered, and in fact was the practice of many, at least to some degree:

> I think we’re duplicating our services quite often. So, we’re trying to “be it all”...instead of just coming together and saying, “you know what? We really deal strongly with domestic violence and all this kinda stuff, so let have a worker
in your building…[I]t’s a concept that’s really difficult, but what we’ve done is, in our industry is we need…we recognize we are not the experts on addiction, so what we did is we contacted the Alberta Health Services…and we asked them to come to us on a day, every week, same time, and we’d book the appointments. So…every Monday morning, we book from 10 o’clock until 11:30, half-hour appointments with all of our clients that need that service. She comes to us. Okay, so its pretty much what we’re talking about collaboratively—all coming to the table—but its us helping another industry: a) get referrals; b) our clients---we realize the struggles our clients go through---so we need to make it easy for them. Right, and the way that we can make it the easiest for them is having service providers be more mobile, be out of our office more.

Solutions such as this—notably coordinated, regularized and sustained—circumvent the some of the mandate issues discussed in this report. While not a total solution to service collaboration shortfalls by any means, it is nonetheless both simple in design and efficient in outcome.

The observation made above also points to a particular model largely exclusive to the Open Door with regard to the comparable extent of its development for relevant youth, and for which the organization received wide acclaim:

[W]e need…one-stop-shopping. That’s what we need. We need a one-stop-shop where people can go in and all the services are right there. And not just “one” [in terms of a location for these] services, but one worker, workers, that are trained a little bit in addictions…but holistically trained to get people to move forward from certain things…especially, like, addictions, homelessness, domestic abuse, unhealthy relationships, whatever…but they’re trained in that, and I don’t think…I don’t think right now what’s happening is…I think we’re duplicating our services quite often.

Models of this variety not only resolve barriers related to the spatial disparity of service organizations and the resulting taxi fares that prevent sustained access to them, but also many of the intellectual barriers discussed in the analysis section. For the Open Door specifically, being able to keep this model in mind while remaining cognizant of the dangers of overstepping its limits by spreading its limited resources too thinly suggests a balance must be constantly negotiated.
Appendix 1:
Interview Guide

Current situation

1. Based on your experience and opinion, is youth homelessness a serious issue in Camrose and area communities?
   - What are the key reasons for youth homelessness in this community?
   - Where might homeless youth stay?
   - Does Camrose Open Door have adequate services and supports in place to meet the needs of homeless and at-risk youth?
   - What do you identify as core drivers or causes of youth homelessness in Camrose?
     o Individual (mental health, abuse, etc)
     o Contextual (employment variability, affordable housing, etc.)

2. What is working well for this target population (best practices at the moment?)

Service delivery

1. How are the existing service networks in Camrose assisting homeless youth in dealing with their needs?

2. In your opinion, what would you identify as the critical gaps/barriers in delivering service for the homeless and at-risk youth population in the community?
   a. Do you have any suggestions to overcome gaps/barriers?

3. Can you identify reasons why youth may not utilize the Open Door or other services?

4. What are the largest challenges facing the Open Door and homelessness programming in the area?
   a. What are the existing gaps in the aforementioned service networks?

Future needs

1. How could current service planning approaches be improved to better meet the needs of homeless youth?

2. If additional resources were available, what (housing) strategies and/or programs would you recommend be put in place to address the needs of this target population?

3. Do you have any suggestions how existing service providers could work together and with Open Door (collaborate) to better meet the needs of the community’s homeless and at-risk youth population?

4. Are there preventative programs that could be deployed?
Appendix 2:
Focus Group Question Guide
Duration: 45-75 minutes

Question 1:
Tell us about your housing circumstances and experiences:

Probe:
1. During this time, which services have you used?
2. Can you tell me how you located these services?
3. Which services have you used the most? Why?

Question 2:
What barriers or challenges have you had in finding or keeping housing?

Probe:
1. Are there things that have really helped in the past?
2. Are there things (people, resources, connections) you wish you had “then”?
3. Where did the Open Door “fit” into all this?

Question 3:
Are there supports in the community that have helped you (eg Open Door) and are there supports that you feel are missing?

Probe:
1. Which services were helpful? Why?
2. What characteristics of staff are most helpful?
3. What characteristics of the organization are most helpful?
4. Which services were not helpful?
5. What characteristics of staff are most unhelpful?
6. What characteristics of the organization are most unhelpful?
7. What services were the least helpful? Why?

Question 4:
If you could imagine something different to help youth (eg, you were the Mayor of Camrose, with a big budget), what would it be? What would Camrose be like?

Probe:
1. If you had a camera in the room and you could talk to funders of services in Camrose or similar areas, what would you say to them?
2. Are there other experiences of your history that you would like to tell us about?