

2022

**RESEARCH REPORT
ON EDUCATION &
YOUTH
HOMELESSNESS
PREVENTION**

PREPARED BY

**YOUTH ACTION
RESEARCH
REVOLUTION (YARR)**

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In collaboration with

DANS LA RUE

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If you don't have a place to stay, how can you go to school?

-Diana, a Black, heterosexual youth of Caribbean descent

2022 Research Report on Education & Youth Homelessness Prevention **OUR PROJECT:**

In 2019, the Youth Action Research Revolution (YARR) interviewed 38 young people who had experienced homelessness in Montreal to learn more about what led to their struggles with housing precarity.

All but one of the youth interviewed described their educational trajectory as key to understanding their housing story. And many shared that they faced barriers and negative experiences in schools long before they became homeless.

These stories confirmed for YARR: Schools must become sites of intervention and support for youth at risk of homelessness.

YARR has been based out of Tio'tia:ke/Mooniyang/Montreal, Quebec since 2018. Comprised mainly of youth who had experienced housing precarity and homelessness, the group documented the experiences of young people with Quebec's public institutions – from schools to hospitals to prisons – to show how those institutions are contributing to the housing crisis facing the province. This report outlines what YARR learned from youth with lived and living experiences of homelessness about schools as sites of homelessness prevention.



Artwork by Shayana Narcisse

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WHO PARTICIPATED?

We interviewed 38 young people with experiences of homelessness and housing precarity, from ages 18-29. Employing a youth-centered and trauma-informed approach, we carried out up to three interviews with each young person, so we could focus on a different institution each time and take the space to get to know each other.

We asked young people to identify themselves the way they thought was important. This included youth who identified across a variety of linguistic, cultural, racial, gendered, and religious identities. Youth were mainly recruited where we worked--at Chez Pop's, Dans la rue's day centre, but sometimes we met young people in other parts of the city. The names we use in this report to share what young people said are pseudonyms.

Young people shared their experiences in Tio'tia:ke/Montréal, but also shared experiences throughout their lives across Turtle Island/North America, and internationally. Findings in this report focus on schooling within a Québécois context of educational policy and practice



Members of YARR (left to right, Narcisse, Watchorn, Adamovicz, Malenfant) sharing reflections on their methodologies at the Action Research Network of the Americas Conference, 2019

PARTNERSHIP WITH DANS LA RUE

Co-leads of the research project, Naomi Nichols and Jayne Malenfant, began working with Dans la rue in 2017. Dans la rue is a service based in Tio'tia:ke/Montréal that serves young people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity. We worked with staff as well as research assistant Emanuel Guay and legal interns Sophie Doyle and Emmanuel Rioux.

Dans la rue currently employs over 75 intervention and outreach workers, administrators, family service workers and housing liaisons, as well as teachers, psychologists, and a nurse. Our team benefited from the supports (and delicious lunches) at Chez Pop's, Dans la rue's the day centre, which serves young people aged 12-25. Dans la rue also offers the Bunker, which provides housing for youth aged 12-21 and the day centre serves all young people aged 12-25 and outreach services for young people through The Van. Dans la rue supported in hiring youth co-researchers Laurence, Shayana, Maxime and Mickey, as well as ongoing supports from intervention staff--including sharing protocols for safety and wellness during our interview processes.

Your teachers clearly know that you're going through something, but that they apply the same rules to everyone, like, there's no exceptions. You know? "If I make an exception for you, I have to make an exception for everybody". But like...I was homeless while everyone was still living with their parents, and they had an allowance, they had a way to eat. Me, I couldn't. I had to steal.
Fariha

-Fariha, a queer francophone immigrant woman of colour

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

92% of young people described their homelessness as part of a longer pathway in their lives that included educational disengagement, often from early childhood

30 of 38 youth shared that they had experienced or observed peers who were unable to access supports in school to ensure their right to education or right to housing

Over half of young people shared that they were already skipping school before they experienced homelessness, due to a lack of supports, bullying, not sleeping at night or having to balance work and school

Just working and going to school and not having a place to stay. Me it's—what frustrates me the most is the..vicious cycle that comes with all of it. Like, it's really hard to have support when you have no support.

-Fariha, a queer francophone immigrant woman of colour

This study was a qualitative study, and thus the findings here, represent qualitative findings with prevalence rates. For more in-depth analysis of YARR's findings, please see Nichols & Malenfant, 2022, Nichols & Malenfant, forthcoming, and Malenfant, Nichols & Watchorn, forthcoming. Or check out our [Deep Commons, Community-Based Research Collective](#) or [Anarchist Studies Network](#) videos discussing our findings.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Over half of young people saw their educational disengagement as stemming from interpersonal issues, including teachers labelling them "bad seeds" or bad students, or instances of racism or homophobia

92% of youth shared experiences with diagnoses of learning disability or mental health diagnoses (often misdiagnoses, or a lack of access to an official diagnosis to receive accommodations). Getting a diagnosis was seen as important to gaining access to education, but many families did not have the finances or ability to secure assessment.

Nearly half of young people described barriers for their parents to advocate on their behalf in terms of learning disabilities and accommodations, and weren't able to engage in advocacy for themselves. Parents may not be able to advocate because of language barriers, their own histories of trauma in schools, or having to work multiple jobs.

IN 2019, YARR SUPPORTED DANS LA RUE IN
IMPLEMENTING THE WITHOUT A HOME SURVEY

OF 135 YOUTH RESPONDENTS IN QUÉBEC AGED 16-29, 54%
DID NOT GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL
THE QUÉBEC NATIONAL AVERAGE IS 13.6%

GAETZ, S., KIDD, S. & SCHWAN, K. (2019, NOVEMBER 5). WITHOUT A HOME: THE NATIONAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY. CANADIAN ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS, EDMONTON, AB.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Youth shared that they would not divulge details about their realities in schools because of fear of punishment, stigma, or involvement of police or youth protection.

Refusing to reach out for fear of police or child welfare involvement means young people were not supported before experiences of homelessness.

74% of youth shared that they did not trust that educators, staff, or school mental health workers understood the root of their problems--often leading to them refusing to reach out at school

Many young people shared that they **hid signs that things were not okay because they didn't trust schools**, and had negative experiences with police, social workers or school administration. Over a third of youth spoke specifically about fear of police due to discrimination based on race, mental health issues, or class.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Over 70% of youth referenced their peers or friends as key supports in their mental health, learning how to navigate social systems, and surviving. Many young people talked about the benefits of peer workers in services, and the likelihood that they were more likely to reach out to workers who "get" what homelessness looks like.

Alternative schools like École Emmett Johns at Dans la rue were described as helpful in meeting young people where they were at and supporting their learning needs--but most youth who used them (81%) shared that they only accessed them after they had been homeless



Over half of youth talked about finding a champion--teacher, guidance counsellor, or other school staff--who was willing to go above and beyond their role. Some young people said that this could be "life-saving."

WHAT DO WE WANT TO CHANGE?

- Moving away from "one-size-fits all" education to provide youth with alternative and flexible educational supports
- Having wraparound supports to accompany school engagement (financial, housing, mental health, legal, alimentary supports)
- Earlier interventions--seeing bullying, intellectual or mental health struggles as points of prevention of youth homelessness
- Resourcing and training teachers on the diverse realities of youth homelessness, and ensuring that school staff can take time to build strong relationships of trust with diverse young people
- Respect! Respect for youth's experiences, and believing what they are saying.
- Access to advocates within the education system, particularly culturally relevant supports for BIPOC youth
- Youth choice of interventions, including multiple ways to access supports (with or without parents, for example)
- An understanding that schools can be a powerful site of prevention for youth homelessness, if we shift to resourcing, training, and employing youth-centered supports before youth are in crisis.

POLICY: WHAT CAN QUÉBEC SCHOOLS DO?

- In QC's Educational Act (I-13, 3), schools have the responsibility to act on many of the issues youth shared:
 - Schools are responsible for the "harmonious integration" of youth with physical, intellectual and learning disabilities
- "Healthy Schools," a QC policy from 2003 requires schools to
 - Adopt a comprehensive and systemic vision of young people's needs and most appropriate strategies for meeting them, with **prevention actions** integrated into school's success plans
- QC's 2017 Policy on Education Success (2017) states that
 - The school system is expected to promote equal opportunity and social equity, counter exclusion and various forms violence and help fight poverty
- *Deux réseaux, un objectif: le développement des jeunes* (2014) along with the interministerial action plan on homelessness prevention (2021-2026) outlines key points where education and social services must work together to support youth
- QC's *National Policy on Homelessness: Working Together to Avoid the Streets*, mentions dropping out of school as a key individual risk factor that can lead to homelessness and social isolation

PRACTICE: WHAT CAN QUÉBEC SCHOOLS DO?

- 1. Listen to young people, and believe what they say. Employ approaches which meet youth where they are at in non-judgemental ways**
- 2. Teachers must be trained and resourced to understand the realities of youth homelessness, including what this looks like for diverse youth (LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous, youth of colour, and youth from diverse economic backgrounds)**
- 3. Curriculum should include topics on homelessness, combating stigmatisation of homelessness as well as supporting youth who may be at-risk of housing precarity to identify their own situations**
- 4. Diversity in representation of teachers, staff, and support workers can build trust across shared experiences with youth from different communities, including linguistic groups and connection to cultural supports**
- 5. Implement options for alternative and flexible programming *before* young people experience homelessness, including multiple points of entry and access to supports**

