



Duty to Assist - Winnipeg

A Youth Homelessness Prevention Movement Towards Restoration of Equity, and Away from Retribution



Acknowledgements

We must begin by acknowledging the brilliant and courageous youth who participated in this work. Through willingness to share their lived-experiences, and the impact they have felt from various social services systems, we were able to create space for dialogue that was grounded in truth. From planning stages, to participating in the event, the vulnerability and reflexivity it takes to have your voice heard is not easy and to do so shows the dedication you have to improving the systems so that others won't have to experience the same level of trauma you've endured. That act of sharing and storytelling is selfless, and a gesture of kindness and compassion.

The four Youth Advisory Council Members who have continued to support the coding of the breakout session notes and the development of this summary report, thank you. This committed group of young adults ensured that we captured the youth voice throughout the writing process and demonstrated innovation and creativity that was instrumental.

We like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the Elders, Knowledge Keepers and performers who opened the event in powerful and reflective ways. Having the privilege in hearing the teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers is a great honour, and one we took with us as we entered into heavy conversations throughout the two days.

We'd also like to thank the various social service representatives who showed up energized and open to critical conversations. Your ability to take the time to engage with others in a solution-focused way, and in a manner that is committed to evolution and change is admirable.

We'd like to thank the presenters who supported this event through their knowledge, professional expertise and guidance.

Finally, we'd like to extend our gratitude to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness for being a partner in this work. We are excited for steps forward in this movement.

Citation: Bramadat, J., Vasik, R., Guiboche, A., Peters, J., Mandamin, N., Fournier, C. (2025). Duty to Assist Winnipeg [online published report]. Retrieved from <https://homelesshub.ca/resource/duty-to-assist-winnipeg/>

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Introduction

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was first introduced in 1943 proposing that human needs may be deduced to a hierarchical five-tier model based on physiological, safety, belongingness and love needs, as well as the need to self-esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1987, McLeod, 2007). This model operates under the proposition that individuals sequentially progress through each level, addressing the lower-level needs prior to striving for the higher ones (Maslow, 1987, McLeod, 2007, Simons, 1987). While the impact of Maslow's theory has been far-reaching and has influenced various sectors, many have challenged the theory as being limited and often rigid in its' reflection of human life, the search for self-actualization and individual differences.

The concept of 'self -actualization' under Maslow's model, is positioned as something to be earned. However, the Blackfoot Nation, whose tribe's teachings are thought to have influenced Maslow's theory, advance a different application of the concept of self-actualization. The First Nations Blackfoot culture views self-actualization as innate, and instead, "... you are credentialed at the start. You're treated with dignity for that reason, but you spend your life living up to that" (Ravilochan, 2021). Further, the Blackfoot teachings underpin the importance of community responsibly in meeting community members' basic needs, ensuring safety, and creating the conditions for the expression of purpose. As Dr. Cindy Blackstock reminds us, "First Nations often consider their actions in terms of the impacts of the "seven generations." This means that one's actions are informed by the experience of the past seven generations and by considering the consequences for the seven generations to follow" (Blackstock, 2007).

As we delve into the topic of youth homelessness prevention and consider the creation of legislation aimed to protect youth from ever experiencing the trauma of houselessness, and the impacts connected to housing displacement such as loss of culture, sense of belonging and identity, we ask the reader to consider Dr. Blackstock's the 'Breath of Life' theory. The Breath of Life (BOL) theory envisions a place where human beings are indivisible from the Earth, from the universe and from human existence across time and space. As fundamentally a relational worldview, the Breath of Life theory draws on similarities to western physics, such as: 1) the confirmation of multiple dimensions of reality, 2) the interconnectedness of time and space, 3) the idea that we are all made of stars, and 4) any serious theoretical development requires a collective effort across time (Blackstock, 2011). The Breath of Life theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of the individual within their community and highlights how the individual experience is embedded

within societal structures. This perspective supports understanding of how systemic issues that impact youth homelessness such as colonization, historical trauma, oppression and discrimination, require community-based solutions to effectively address youth homelessness. The western hierarchical view of aging often means that years of life automatically translate into acquired wisdom; however, this doesn't allow for youth's voices to be heard and valued, which means they are often excluded from being part of the conversation in finding solutions. The relational worldview of the BOL theory acknowledges our innate value from birth and therefore highlights the strength and wisdom of youth voices, a guiding point for this project.

What is a 'Duty to Assist'?

According to the Homeless Hub, a Duty to Assist is a “human rights approach to homelessness prevention that involves a legal duty for authorities to make ‘reasonable’ efforts to end a person’s homelessness or to stabilize their housing” (Homelessness Hub). Modelled off the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*, the creation of a Duty to Assist legislation in Manitoba would make homelessness prevention a statutory responsibility of the government.

According to the Homeless Hub, a Duty to Assist would include the following:

- **Rights-based approach:** The rights protected under a Duty to Assist are not only human rights, but legal rights.
- **Obligation to act:** Upon presentation to the organization that is locally coordinating the duty to assist, state actors are obliged to act within 14 days to provide assistance in the form of housing-led support, not just information about housing support.
- **Reconciling different duties to assist:** Different mainstream services may have similar duties to report or assist, for example systems such as health care, justice, and child protection. Importantly, homelessness prevention policy based on Duty to Assist should not be confused with similar directives outlined in child protection, for instance. As such, Duty to Assist policy and practice must clearly outline the circumstances under which reporting and assistance involves child protection or other systems, programs, and services.
- **Addressing the needs of Indigenous youths:** In alignment with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all Duty to Assist efforts must strive to be equitably applied to Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, without service disparities. Indigenous youth need to have access to culturally appropriate, Indigenous-led housing and supports.

Assistance must be based on a respect for traditional knowledge, cultural traditions and practices, and account for the impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities, including intergenerational and collective trauma.

- **Quality assurance:** Duty to Assist legislation must be backed up by measures to ensure full access to support, quality services, opportunities for client feedback and input, and a demonstration of impact. This includes delineating when the Duty to Assist has been met.
- **Housing-led supports:** Assistance should always be housing-led. In other words, referring a young person to an emergency shelter or other homelessness service that offers minimal support to rehouse the young person would not count as having provided assistance or completion of a duty to assist; if it does not end the person's homelessness or stabilize their housing.
- **Client-centred support:** The support offered to young people through Duty to Assist must be client-centred, meaning the choices of young people as to whether they want help and what support they need is respected, along with their ongoing consent.
- **Unconditional support:** The offer of assistance cannot come with conditions such as abstinence, engagement in education or employment, or participation in programming.
- **Equitable provision:** There must be a commitment to the equitable provision of duty to assist, with efforts to ensure barriers to benefitting from this legislation are minimized as much as possible. This can be done through broad structural and systems prevention efforts (e.g., amendments to sex trafficking laws, equitable systems funding on First Nations reserves), and through accountability mechanisms established throughout systems of care.
- **Emphasis on place-based support:** There is a need to ensure that as much as possible, supports are place-based and that people are not forced to leave their communities to receive services due to lack of available supports.

Prior to moving this model forward at a structural level, it must be explored within communities what Duty to Assist means to a diversity of lived and living experience experts, service providers, and community members.

In October 2024, in Winnipeg, an event was held that aims to do just this; to explore within a Winnipeg-based context: a) What are the pathways and systems that may lead to youth/young adults experiencing homelessness, b) What would homelessness prevention and intervention look like within a duty to assist model, c) What solution-focused changes and improvements should be

reflected in legislation that would prevent intergenerational experiences of homelessness, d) What reasonable, minimum steps or actions are required to move this model forward. The following report is a summary of findings from the 2.5-day event held in October 2024, in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg Launch

In May 2024, End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) in collaboration with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, began the early stages of planning an event aimed to explore ‘Duty to Assist’. Operating under the Prevention pillar at EHW, this work is framed as a youth homelessness prevention movement, and the kick-off event was aimed at generating initial conversations among lived/living experts, policy makers, service providers, academics and community members. Recognizing early on that we wanted the event to be lived expert driven, a Youth Advisory Council was developed and comprised of youth and young adults under the age of 29, who had lived experiences with homelessness and who have navigated systems such as the Child and Family Services system. The Youth Council, comprised of 15-20 lived and living experts along with community partner support staff, determined who needed to be at the event, and what types of questions should be discussed.

In total, approximately 80 people were invited to attend the Duty to Assist event held on October 16-18, 2024. While not all the provincial government invitees could attend, many sent Departmental representatives. Invitees were cross-departmental, and cross-sectoral with efforts to have various perspectives represented from people who worked both direct service and in-direct.

Figure 1: List of Participants¹

Government of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg	Indigenous Governments	Winnipeg-Based School Divisions	Community Partners	Academics	Elders/Knowledge Keepers	Young Adult Advisory Council
Department of Families, Child Protection Branch	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs	Louis Riel School Division	Community Education Development Association	Canadian Observatory on Homelessness	Barbara Bruce	15-20, on a given day
Department of Families, Legislation and Strategic Policy	First Nations Health and Social Secretariate	Pembina Trails School Division	Community Entity - City of Thompson	Cardiff University	Betty Edel	
Department of Housing, Addictions, Homelessness and Mental	Manitoba Inuit Association	River East Transcona School Division	End Homelessness Winnipeg	SPECTRUM	Cheryl Alexander	

¹ More than one representative may have been in attendance from each organization. For the list of invitees who were unable to attend, please see **Appendix A**.

Health, Strategic Initiatives and Program Support						
Employment and Income Assistance	Manitoba Metis Federation	Seven Oaks School Division	Futures Forward	University of Manitoba	Debra Diubaldo	
FASD Justice	Southern Chiefs Organization	St. James Assiniboine School Division	Ka Na Kanichihk Inc.	University of Winnipeg	Marsha Missyabit	
Senior Advisor on Homelessness		Winnipeg School Division, Chief Superintendent	Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre	York University		
Youth Justice		Winnipeg School Division, Children of the Earth	Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth			
			Mental Health Services for Children, Youth and Families			
			New Directions			
			Resource Assistance for Youth			
			Rossbrook House			
			Shawenim Abinooji Org.			
			The Link			
			Voices			
			Zoongizi Ode (Formerly Fearless R2W)			

Over the course of the 2.5 days, participants had assigned seating at different tables to support a variety of perspectives. A total of four breakout questions were discussed, and the assigned seating

changed on the second day, to ensure that a variety of disciplines was consistently represented at each table, promoting diversity in lived and professional experience. There was also a lived expert at each table, with an EHW staff member and if chosen, a support worker. A sacred fire overseen by Fire Keepers, was lit and Elder support was onsite throughout the event. Mental health clinicians from Mount Carmel Clinic were also available during this event. The event was emceed by two Indigenous youth.

While the event was intended to provide a safe place and space for important dialogue about youth homelessness prevention there was also several presentations delivered that helped ‘set the stage’ for dialogue. The presenters included:

- Betty Edel, an expert in homelessness prevention in Winnipeg who has dedicated over 30 years to advocating for social justice in her community. Drawing from her personal and professional knowledge, Betty spoke of the impact colonization, systems-interaction and intergenerational trauma has on people and how this increases risk of experiences with homelessness.
- Jino Distasio, PhD, is a distinguished leader in housing and neighbourhood development, urban planning, and urban revitalization. He spoke about the importance of research and its capacity to improve lives in Manitoba and beyond.
- Brenda L. Gunn, a prominent Métis legal scholar at the University of Manitoba, is dedicated to Indigenous law and activism. An active participant in the global Indigenous rights movement, she has assisted the UN and created a handbook on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, aiming to promote justice for future generations.
- Peter Mackie is recognized for his pivotal role in implementing the ‘Duty to Assist’ legislation in Wales. His insights into this successful model sparked meaningful conversations about how similar strategies could be adapted to Manitoba’s context. Participants learned that in Wales, approximately two-thirds of those who received assistance in the first year successfully avoided homelessness—an inspiring statistic that underscores the potential for legislative frameworks to drive impactful change.
- Stephen Gaetz, PhD, CM, from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness at York University, shared valuable insights regarding the impact of ‘Duty to Assist’ on youth and young adults facing homelessness. His research emphasizes the necessity of

understanding the unique challenges that these demographics face, adding depth to our discussions.

The event began with an opening ceremony and each day there was an opening prayer in the mornings as well as Indigenous young adult performances by Inuit Throat Singers, The Link Boys Drumming Group, and the Ivan Flett Memorial Dancers. For a copy of the full agenda, please see **Appendix B**.

Over 100 pages of notes were taken during the event. Additionally, an artist contracted through Synonym was hired to listen and observe the conversations and provide a live illustration of the conversations. Kale Sheppard produced an impactful illustration that captured the 2.5-days of conversation in one image. This image was presented to the Youth Advisory Council for feedback and the final product has been included in **Appendix C** and is also available in print upon request.

The following summary of findings is the outcome of analysis completed by four lived-expert, young adults who reviewed and synthesized all breakout session notes. This group demonstrated tremendous dedication and commitment in producing the overarching themes and primary findings in a collaborative manner, and the vision for how the work is presented reflects their creativity.

Findings: What are the pathways/systems that may lead to youth/young adults experiencing homelessness?

For the first breakout session, participants were assigned to join one of ten tables each with a lived expert, note taker and facilitator. The first set of discussion questions were related to exploring pathways into homelessness, and the risk factors that impact people. This discussion included identifying key players involved in youths' lives as they encounter housing insecurity.

In the words of the lived experts, and event attendees, experiences of youth homelessness is the **outcome of broken systems and is rooted in the history of colonization**, the impacts of which are felt everyday in tangible and harmful ways. In a quote from the discussion at Table #2 participants stated that *“systems have a choice and fail us every time. Systems perpetuate problems”*. Findings from the first breakout session indicate that participants understand that we have been operating within the same westernized, colonial structures for generations, and have witnessed how the root of the problems stay the same, leading to perpetuating traumatic cycles. Participants argued that a critical look at all the current systems is required, and an entirely new framework from which to operate is needed to make change. Simply stated, we can't create true lasting change from systemic issues if we stay stuck within the structures of systems that have proven not to work.

Participants determined the following to be intersections of pathways, systems and scenarios that lead to youth experiences of homelessness.

Pathway 1: Colonization has led to systemically ingrained racism, discrimination, community displacement, a disconnection from Indigenous cultural ways of knowing and being due to the ongoing legacy of residential schools and their mission to *“kill the Indian in the child”*. Many youths face the impacts of intergenerational trauma daily; all of which increases risk of experiences of homelessness. There is also the use of screening and assessment tools that have been designed from a Western perspective and may not be appropriate to use with Indigenous peoples and can be retraumatizing. As one participant stated, *“Design of assessments ought to be tailored to demographics they serve...Indigenous people's voices need to be heard and valued as community members, families, not minimizing issues they faced due to government saying no or muting voices”*.

Pathway 2: Substance Use Disorder is another factor; currently most systems do not operate from a harm reduction model of care, and this can result in people having limited options/access to needed supports. Even when accessing resources, many are denied or kicked out from shelters or youth homes, for example, for small infractions or having any amount of substance, which leads only to more instability and harm to these youth.

Pathway 3: Transitions between Government Systems

The Child and Family Services (CFS)

The CFS system increases risk of youth homelessness. For youth in care, there is often lack of reunification efforts to safely find natural community-based supports such as family and friends which can often result in deepening broken relationships or not allowing for repair of existing broken relationships. Youth in care are often left unsupported upon turning 18 and are propelled into adulthood without learning essential life skills such as financial literacy, cooking, cleaning etc., and often lack healthy mentorship, role models and connections to community. When transitioning out of CFS care to emergency shelters, couch surfing or living rough, youth are actively experiencing homelessness, and a lack of stability that impact healthier trajectories such as educational attainment, sense of belonging and identity and, connection to culture.

Justice System Involved

There are ongoing harmful impacts that youth endure, as they interact with the youth justice system, including violence, mental health issues and lack of ability to learn how to maintain healthy relationships. Youth are not often receiving the care that they require, particularly when they are being released from Manitoba Youth Corrections (MYC) and re-entering into the community. Implicit challenges related to exiting MYC include aging 'out' or turning 18 while incarcerated and then being without previous supports such as CFS or Children's Disability Services, upon release. It was relayed that youth are also not receiving the services that meet their psychosocial needs while incarcerated, including medical and psychiatric assessments, as well as education. As articulated by one table, "*Community restorative justice (is) needed over legal enforcement.*"

Children's Disability Services to Community Living Disability Services

Children's Disability Services was noted by participants to be increasingly overwhelmed, and unable to manage caseloads that are required of them. This system is also difficult to navigate -

from assessment and diagnosis to continuity of care, when transitioning to Community Living DisAbility Services (CLdS). There are risk factors associated with the unmet needs of families requiring supports, including lack of respite, which could lead to caregivers being unable to work, or access individualized education plans for children and youth, as well as causing financial strains which all can lead to housing insecurity.

Pathway 4: The unique needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth going unaddressed is another factor; many youths' gender and/or sexual identities are not accepted by their family of origin which can lead to them being suddenly displaced or living at constant risk of being kicked out. This can also lead to 2SLGBTQIA+ youth suppressing their true selves (leading to severe mental health issues) which can also lead to high rates of homelessness and housing insecurity. Additionally, some programs or resources that are available to youth are also unfortunately unsafe spaces that don't recognize, affirm or "believe" in the specific identities of the community, meaning that even when accessing help 2SLGBTQIA+ youth must suppress their identities, or forgo help altogether. "*Gender-diverse people not fitting in*" or feeling like they have a place at shelters or group homes which are primarily divided into binary genders can mean that they turn to sleeping rough instead making them even more vulnerable to harm and mental health issues.

Pathway 5: Poverty, including intergenerational poverty, lack of affordable housing and low vacancy rates in market housing, inability to lease an apartment without a guarantor, a lack of knowledge of how to advocate for themselves with landlords and the process of finding/keeping a rental, alongside difficulty balancing education and the necessity of providing income for oneself, food insecurity, and the limiting current structure of the EIA system are all major issues youth face that contribute to homelessness. For many youth, even those who may have access to some financial aid, it was noted that often they are not taught financial literacy making it more difficult to achieve any sense of sustainable financial stability.

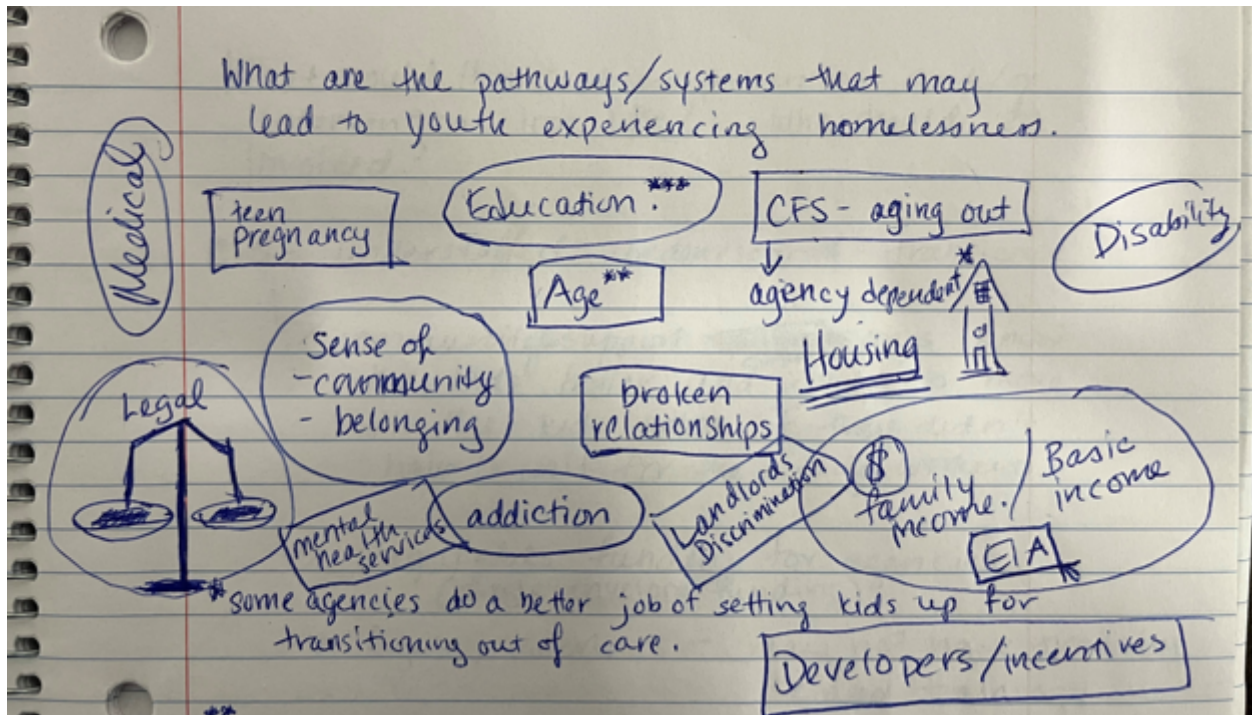
Pathway 6: Lack of health care, including limited or no access to medical supports in rural and remote communities and reserves, transport to medical centres or the ability to see a family doctor. Limited access to resources for those experiencing mental health issues, as well as being neurodivergent, disabled, or experiencing teen pregnancy all increases the risk of experiencing homelessness, as it can make attending school or maintaining employment virtually impossible. One participant shared regarding their FASD diagnosis, "*if I had awareness of outcome*

and how it affects me, not understanding what the tests are for, and the long-term outcomes”, more opportunities would have been opened for them. Nearly all mental health resources in the province have long wait times which does not allow for upstream support and instead means many youth only access support when they are already in crisis. Further, unsafe discharge processes from crisis stabilization units can put youth in precarious situations.

Pathway 7: Migrating from Home Community to Urban Cities

There were representatives from rural and remote communities at the event who spoke about the difficulties families encounter when migrating from their home community to urban cities such as Winnipeg. There are ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors related to decisions to leave community. Influencing decisions to leave home communities include concerns with adequate housing, including overcrowding; access to employment; access to medical care including mental health and addictions services, and concerns with violent crime, including gang recruitment; displacement due to environmental disasters such as fire and flood. As one table wrote, “Thompson (has) one of the highest rates for homelessness – one of the top 3. Due to the high rates of unhealthy homes has resulted in youth feeling safer on streets and/or with gangs. (We) need safer homes”.

Figure 2: Youth Homelessness - Pathways



Findings: What would homelessness prevention and/or intervention look like?

What steps can we take towards prevention and intervention efforts for youth homelessness? The overarching findings are consistently grounded in a framework of **accountability**.

What do we want? **Systems that promote holistic wellbeing where “someone does not need to be homeless to get support”**. Waiting until someone is in crisis is not a viable option for making systemic change, furthermore it does not allow for an upstream prevention-based approach.

As identified by participants, youth homelessness models of prevention and intervention were connected by these 5 overarching themes:

- 1) Systems of accountability that promote continuity of care.
- 2) Sustainably supported social services and resources across places and spaces.
- 3) Interdependent rather than ‘independent’ living models that promote knowledge accumulation related to life skills.
- 4) Mediation and advocacy services that are grounded in upholding the rights of young adults.
- 5) Mentors and community connections that uphold a sense of belonging.

1. Accountability

There is a critical need for accountability across all systems and levels of governments. We all have a ‘duty to assist’ and work to prevent youth homelessness from occurring. This type of framework emphasizes a readiness-based approach over an age-based framework. Therefore, youth turning 18 and aging out of CFS care won’t just be sent out on their own, their needs would be assessed, and an interdependent living model would be adopted, possibly including a post age-of-majority support worker team. As this work is being done, each system – education, justice, CFS and child welfare, healthcare, landlords etc., would need to be accountable for their impact and support workers would need to be trained and kept up to date. There needs to be an emphasis on all levels of government being accountable to this upstream approach.

2. Services and Resources

Support services and resources (that include financial, mental health, medical) that are easier for individuals to navigate and access what they need, when they need it are required. Participants call on the creation of spaces with co-located resources that allow for more team and peer-based

involvement. Schools are already a hub for youth, and participants indicate needing to see more resources brought into such environments where the youth already are, and to help them feel safe and connected while there. Youth and education professionals have expressed a need for the schools to act not only as a hub for learning, but as a hub for community that allows students to feel welcomed even when they are not able to fully attend classes (rather than punitive measures for absences that only result in alienation from the school and can jeopardize their stability).

Currently there are challenges to accessing file information across multiple systems, due to privacy regulations. While protection of people's privacy is important, participants noted that it is necessary to review such regulations with consideration about how sharing information might support individuals in accessing resources. Participants called for the safe dismantling of barriers around privacy of information.

3. Interdependent vs. Independent Living

A multi-system, collaborative approach to enhance skills that uphold 'interdependent living', including teaching cooking, cleaning, bill management, taxes and other life skills, is required. Participants noted that an assisted living model for all ages, and spaces designed by youth for youth with appropriate programming and resources, would help youth feel supported, versus living in isolation from community and having to 'figure it out' for themselves. One example provided, is that currently many group homes and youth shelters either expect participation in chores without teaching the youth how and/or assuming a basic knowledge exists, that many have never been taught. Another example is youth not being involved at all with housekeeping duties and are then unable to take care of themselves when they do move out with roommates or on their own, which can even result in losing their housing.

4. Mediation and Advocacy

Anti-discriminatory policies and processes that support youth in obtaining housing, including mediation services, improved advocacy efforts by the Residential Tenancies Branch (RTB) that can prevent displacement and changes to existing regulations that require guarantor signatures, is required. Participants want to see timely access to housing; the more barriers that are removed from youth accessing and securing housing means more stability. This is an often-overlooked area of the housing process that can be insurmountable without the support of an adult who has already navigated the rental system. Further, youth obtaining their first place on their own are frequently

discriminated against for their age, viewed as untrustworthy tenants or blocked from renting without a guarantor, cosigner or previous rental history which they may not have access to.

5. Mentorship and Community Belonging

Increased mentorship supports, specifically peer-to-peer relationships, and cultural mentors, that promote building trust within systems is an important requirement. This also includes fostering a supportive community to reduce isolation and foster a sense of belonging. This could include, for example, support workers with lived experience and trauma-informed perspectives; providing accessible, specialized services for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth; access to Elders or Indigenous community members within foster homes and schools, as well as members from other cultural communities where possible that reflect the diverse community we have here in Winnipeg who can provide support. Building connections and relationships helps develop trust, self-esteem and a foundation for youth to fall back on and launch their own journeys from a safe starting point. This is a central focus of the relational worldview of the BOL theory – “community actualization” is inextricably linked with a sense of community, belonging, love and relationship building.

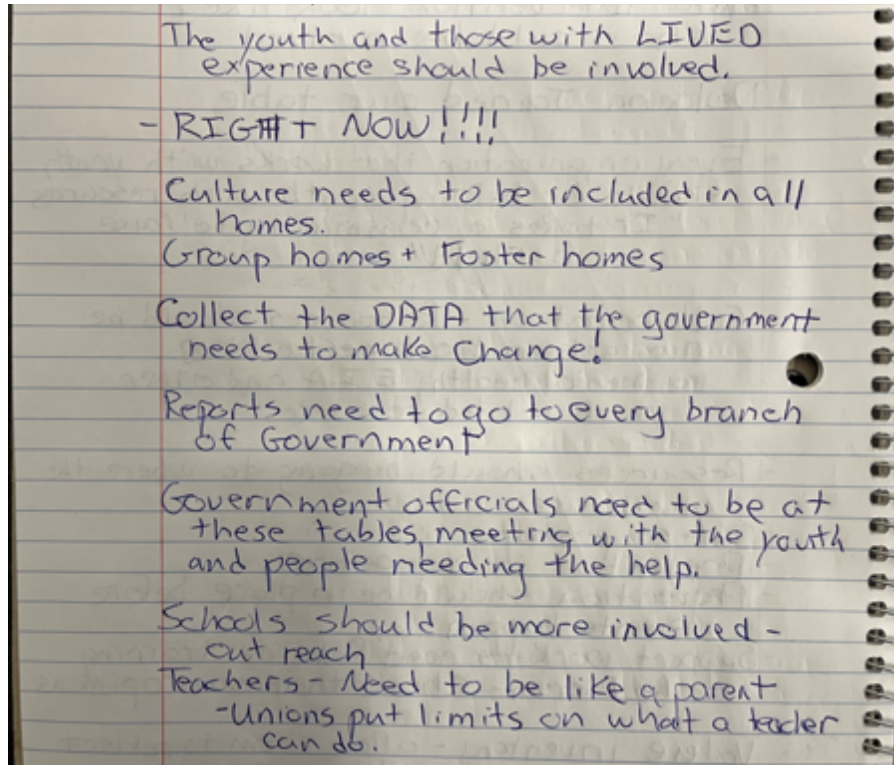
Who Should Be Involved?

Ultimately all human beings need connection with community. Youth need to have a place where they feel a sense of belonging and love as this can lead to some of the biggest positive impacts in their individual story, as well as great change on a community level.

Who should be involved? Very simply, **everyone should be part of youth homelessness prevention.** *“People get used to or (are) sensitized to visible homelessness. If it no longer shocks people, then they won't act. You want concern and care, and the shock. A 16-year-old person homeless on the street should trigger concern and action”.*

Participants further emphasized that the role of lived-experts, Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, leaders, and educators are particularly important in supporting youth and their families early on. They also highlighted the importance of trusting relationships between education staff in creating preventive measures. Participants further emphasized that policymakers that represent ‘systems as a whole’, who have the ‘power’ to influence policy change, should be listening to lived-experts and ground policy-decision making from a lens of Reconciliation.

Figure 3: Youth Homelessness – Prevention/Intervention



Findings: What solution-focused changes and improvements do you want to see reflected in legislation, regulations, processes and programming, that would prevent inter-generational experiences of homelessness?

What would legislative reform need to look like? **Statutory reform must move towards restoration of equity and away from, retribution.**

What does this mean? That **people don't have to go through repetitive experiences of trauma before receiving services.** This means an upstream approach to prevent people from ever experiencing homelessness, and equity-based processes across all systems.

Participants identified that restorative action needs to be grounded in:

- 1) Streamlined access to supports
- 2) Consistency and reliability of supports
- 3) Restorative justice and equitable practices
- 4) Housing and employment support
- 5) Education and youth support

1. Streamlined Access

Unified Database/System: One shared system with all relevant information.

Avoid Re-traumatization: No repeated or intrusive forms or intake processes.

Centralized Access: One-stop access for services/resources (phone app, emergency support). As one table wrote, *"An app that can be used as a resource that will help map out service supports they need. May include mental health, housing, community cultural events"*. Further, there must be infrastructure in place to support the transitions 'out of' and 'between' interacting systems.

2. Consistency and Reliability

One of the hardest things to do is take the first step and reach out to ask for support, especially as a vulnerable youth. Far too often this important first difficult step is met with an incredibly long wait time for urgent situations, a 'wild goose chase' in providing necessary forms, signatures, etc., that

the youth may not have access to or need transportation. Additionally, the youth may also be met with apathy, or negative reactions to their brave step of reaching out for help.

Participants want to see a:

Team Approach: Promoting a collaborative team model, rather than having individual caseworkers. Participants posited that this would alleviate the burden of large caseloads on workers, and allow for shared knowledge, person-centered support and a combined effort.

Reliable Support: Consistent and immediate resources available for those reaching out, not denying or turning away youth at service points for any reason is needed; *“No barriers rather than ‘low’ barrier”*.

Training was also described not only as being critical to consistency and reliability of service provision, but also the need to *“intentionally teach and train people to see how unwell the system is, and to critically examine possible solutions”* was emphasized. Further, training for existing employees is crucial, to keep staff updated with changing systems, trauma-informed practices, and person-centred support approaches. The Youth Council recommended that service providers and other professionals who work with youth, should be required to have updated training on a regular basis (such as 2 years), so they can stay actively informed on the rapidly changing world of mental health, trauma-informed care, harm reduction, and anti-oppressive practice.

Restorative Justice and Equitable Practices

Restorative, Not Retributive Justice: Shifting from punishment to restoration and rehabilitation models is critical. Youth should not be punished for being poor or in the systems they are born into over which they have no control. A consistent theme reflected by participants and lived experts, is that they were discriminated against, disciplined or mistreated because they were experiencing poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, instead of being supported or treated with kindness and empathized with. The very systems that are there to offer supports can often be another area of traumatization for young people and can often leave them feeling hopeless. Youth who bravely reach out for help when they

are struggling or are on the verge of homelessness or suffering severe mental health issues have sometimes been turned away and told to ‘try harder’ without any support to do so being provided. Further, often when these youths move farther down the systems pipeline, they are then reprimanded for not seeking help earlier. As one table states, *“help (should) not be unavailable because people are not homeless or struggling ‘enough’”*.

EIA System Overhaul: Including, streamlined application process, ability to work and receive support, no longer *“clawing back earnings”*, and re-consideration of the EIA rates. The current rates, *“promote poverty with below poverty line income support”* and don’t allow for applicants to improve their financial futures.

Universal Basic Income: In almost every table, “support Universal Basic Income” as well as a “living wage/ living basic income” was mentioned, highlighting its importance. This is a foundational economic support model that in many different practical trials has shown extremely positive results and life-changing stability for participants.

Housing and Employment

Landlord Engagement: Fostering relationships with landlords, accept rent subsidies, holding landlords to higher and more enforceable standards and regulations that protect tenants’ rights is an important element.

Eviction Prevention: Including rent top-ups and tenant insurance for youth, mentorship or case workers who can help advocate on behalf of, or alongside youth are also needed.

Employment Pathways: Providing programs that lead directly to employment is another important factor.

Understanding supports required for stable housing: Focusing on reunification and youth stability, as well as community building, alongside housing needs of the individual is required. There also needs to be better understandings of what housing instability is, and recognition that as one table described this way, *“shelters shouldn’t be considered hous[ing]”*. Participants also identified that there should be appropriate access to housing and education in First Nations

communities, so that people don't have to migrate to urban locations due to limited opportunities in community. Finally, participants call on Housing First programs, specific for youth aging out of CFS care.

Education and Positive Outcomes for Youth

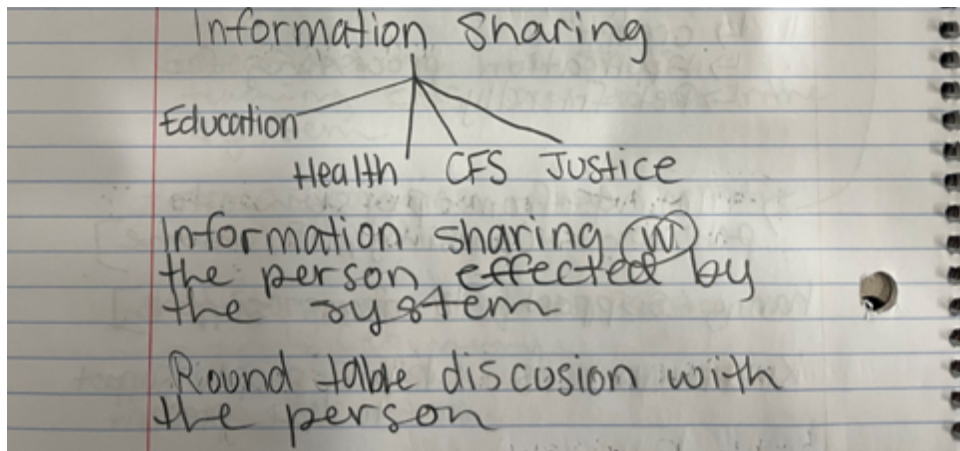
Policy Reform and Promoting 'Schools as Hubs' for Support

Changing suspension and absenteeism policies, to ensure that children, youth and families are not being 'punished' for factors that are outside of their control is needed. Participants identified that schools could act as 'hubs' to support children, youth and families, in the community and that onsite mentors, peer-to-peer supports, and outreach involvement should be promoted within the schools. Ideas such as extended after-school and evening activity programs and parent/family rooms, as well as a rotating support worker/counsellor that have days where they are present at several schools within a division, was also proposed by participants.

Alternative High School Models Youth-centered alternative education, such as Argyle Alternative High School, can make the difference between students dropping out or eventually being able to graduate. Participants also suggested that the education system needs to "re-define winning", suggesting that successes (even the 'smaller' successes) of individuals should be celebrated, such as "*attend(ing) their events with them to cheer them on*", rather than punitive approaches taken to 'compel' students to attend school.

Participants consistently called for a person-centered approach to legislation creation that prioritizes the needs and voices of the youth. In their own words: "*Nothing for me without me.*"

Figure 5: Person-Centred Policies



Findings: What might implementation of a ‘Duty to Assist’ model, mean to youth and young adults, our community, and service providers?

What might implementation of a ‘Duty to Assist’ model mean? A commitment to **Reconciliation**.

If there was adequate financial support provided to each system (i.e., education, health, CFS, justice, CLdS), geared towards prevention efforts that incorporate cultural and traditional understandings of holistic well-being, it is argued that youth homelessness could be eradicated. Eradication of youth homelessness would have a profound impact on individual youth and their families, service providers and the community as well as our society. Looking through a lens of Seven Generations, we would also have a chance at eradicating all forms of homelessness for future generations by taking away a major entry point, as the *“best window of opportunity is 16-24, after that it’s mainly intervention measures.”*

If we can prevent people from ever falling into homelessness at a young age and provide them with stability, security and safety, we are most likely preventing them from ever experiencing homelessness during their life course therefore eliminating intergenerational poverty and homelessness.

Service Providers

For service providers, ‘Duty to Assist’ might mean having sustainable, fully staffed organizations working together to support the needs of young people. As described by participants, this would allow service providers to:

- a) Listen and respond to the needs of young people
- b) Work collaboratively to respond to needs through information sharing and resource allocation
- c) Work across systems to provide follow-up case management and continuity of care, ensuring that youth are supported over the long term.

Youth and Young Adults

For youth and young adults, a ‘Duty to Assist’ model would mean being heard and involved in policy decisions, and having access to supports with minimal barriers. This would result in trust being built between young people and service providers, and communities where

youth feel safe, valued, and heard. This would also mean, as stated by participants, “mentorship of other Indigenous youth who will build confidence, trust and connectivity to land/community”.

As described by participants, under a ‘Duty to Assist’ model, youth would NOT be:

- As costly, at a systems level
- Sexually exploited
- Incarcerated
- CFS involved
- Separated from their families
- Traumatized

Rather, under a ‘Duty to Assist’ model, youth WOULD be:

- Housed securely
- Stable
- Empowered through knowledge and reduced ‘red tape’ (bureaucratic processes)
- Provided with mental health and addictions supports
- Provided with mentorship and peer supports
- Educated
- Employed
- Healthy
- Safe

A Duty to Assist model would also prevent inter-generational experiences of homelessness from perpetuating thus reducing homelessness overall and fostering healthy individuals, families and communities that can thrive.

Community

For Manitobans, ‘Duty to Assist’ would mean a better understanding of love and compassion, intended to “*create healing, connections, community, love, and care*”. The impact for community, would be the ability to uphold the human rights of youth in Manitoba, and maintain the dignity, value and safety for young people. Community would have an enhanced understanding of ‘homelessness’, and would be better equipped to:

- Take action

- Be accountable for ones' actions
- Promote hope and sense of community belonging
- Work together in collaboration to promote safety for young people

Participants state, that "If people's needs are met, people would flourish, mental health (issues), poverty, homelessness would be demolished".

Figure 6: What Duty to Assist 'Could' Mean

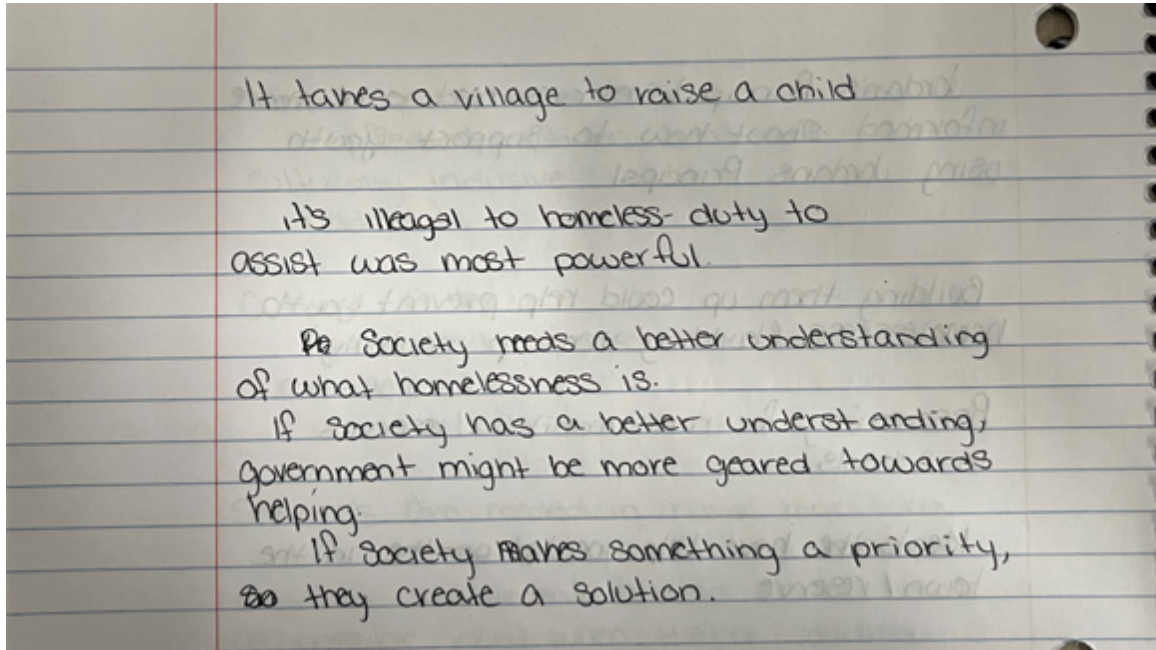


Figure 7: Duty to Assist – Illustration²



² For a printed copy of this illustration, please contact Jbramatat@endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca

Conclusion and Next Steps

In Professor Brenda Gunn’s presentation at the Winnipeg-based event, the following question was posed: “*Where, in the legal landscape, does Duty to Assist fit?*”. This initial question begs subsequent questions such as, despite International Human Rights Law, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Federal legislation such as the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Federal Housing Advocate, Indigenous Peoples’ Rights, Provincial, and Municipal regulations, why does youth homelessness in Manitoba continues to exist? Returning to the teaching of the Breath of Life theory, all children are born with innate value, and it is our societal responsibility to nurture holistic wellbeing so that self actualization may occur. Following the Winnipeg launch in October 2024, follow-up meetings have occurred with the following groups:

- Lived-expert participants and their community service providers including:
 - The Link
 - N’Dinawe
 - RaY!
 - Shawenim Abinoojii
 - Voices: Network of Care
 - Zoongizi Ode Inc.
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
- Department of Families (Manitoba Government)
- Department of Housing, Homelessness, Addictions and Mental Health (Manitoba Government)
- Faculty of Law and Access to Justice, University of Manitoba
- Geography, University of Winnipeg
- Human Rights Department, University of Manitoba
- Ka Na Kanichihk Inc.
- Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth
- Manitoba Harm Reduction Network
- Social Work Department, University of Manitoba
- Tracia’s Trust: Manitoba’s Sexual Exploitation Strategy (Manitoba Government)

Through our analysis, supported by 3 lived-expert young adults, findings from this event as well as from information gathered through follow-up meetings and consultations, it is recommended that immediate next steps entail:

- 1) Grounding the youth homelessness prevention, Duty to Assist, movement at a Provincial level
- 2) Prioritizing youth/young adult lived-expert voice by increasing members of the Youth Advisory Council, ensuring that youth from rural and remote communities are represented
- 3) Ensuring that the Youth Advisory Council oversees the dissemination of findings from the Winnipeg-launch, and information gathered in the future
- 4) Developing an Elders Council
- 5) Building relationships with rural and remote communities, specifically in the North, to develop an understanding of what youth/young adults residing outside of Winnipeg, might need reflected in Provincial legislation.
- 6) Ongoing collaboration with policy-makers and continued alignment with community partners, advocates, and lived-experts.

This work must continue to be grounded in the youth's voices, needs and ideas, as well as the relational worldview of the Breath of Life Theory. As one table wrote on the final page, "*Listening to the youth was empowering,*" and this sentiment must be carried forward into the next phase of exploration.

The findings from the Duty to Assist event have shown that the interconnectivity of all systems have and continue to lead to youth homelessness and yet, they will also be able to lead us away from it; restorative and prevention-based actions are possible and necessary. We all have a role to play and a sacred Duty to Assist our young relatives on this land.



3

³ A heartfelt thank you to Rianna Vasik who developed this illustration and the illustration on the front cover.

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Appendix A: List of Invitees Who Sent their Regrets

- Assistant Superintendent of Indigenous Education
- Board of True North Sports and Entertainment
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Comm-Unity 204
- Community Entity- City of Brandon
- Deputy Premier, Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care
- Life's Journey
- Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation
- Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc., Grand Chief
- Manitoba Metis Federation, President
- Mayor of the City of Winnipeg
- Manitoba Harm Reduction Network
- Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning
- Minister of Families, Minister Responsible for Accessibility, Minister Responsible for Women and Gender Equity
- Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, and Minister Responsible for Mental Health
- Minister of Housing, Manitoba Metis Federation
- Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Keeper of the Great Seal of the Province of Manitoba, Minister Responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation
- Native Clan Organization
- N'Dinawe
- North End Community Renewal
- Ongomiizwin-Indigenous Institute, Health Services
- Premier and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and International Relations and the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Reconciliation
- SEED Winnipeg Inc.
- Southern Chiefs Organization, Grand Chief
- Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation

Appendix B: Duty to Assist, Agenda

Duty to Assist-Agenda -October 16-18, 2024 Sargent Tommy Prince Place, 90 Sinclair Street	
Type of Action	Time
Day 1: Opening Night – October 16, 2024 (4-6:30 pm)	
Doors Open and Smudge	4-4:25
Introduction of the MCs, housekeeping, Land Acknowledgment	4:25-4:35
Blessing	4:35-4:40
Dinner Served	4:40-5:00
Zeann Manernaluk and Aleatra Sammurtok – Inuit Throat Singers	5:10-5:30
Introductory Comments – Dr. Jino Distasio	5:30-6:00
Closure of the opening night– Betty Edel	6:00-6:15
Day 2: First Session Discussion – October 17, 2024 (AM)	
Doors Open and Smudge	8:30-9:00
Opening Comments	9:00-9:10
The Link Drumming Group	9:10-9:20
Dr. Steven Gaetz and Dr. Peter Mackie – Presentation and Q&A	9:20-11:00
Break	11:00-11:15
First Breakout Session: What are the pathways/systems that may lead to youth/young adults experiencing homelessness?	11:15-12:15
Day 2: Second Session Discussion – October 17, 2024 (PM)	
Lunch	12:15-1:15
Second Breakout Session: What would homelessness prevention and/or intervention look like? Who should be involved?	1:15-2:45
Break	2:45-3:00
Roundtable discussion: What have been valuable learnings of the day? What is our hope for tomorrow's discussions?	3:00-4:15
Closure of First Day	4:15-4:20
Day 3: Third Session Discussion – October 18, 2024 (AM)	
Doors Open and Smudge	8:30-9:00

Opening Comments	9:00-9:10
Ivan Flett Memorial Dancers	9:10-9:20
Professor Brenda Gunn – Presentation and Q&A	9:20-10:45
Break	10:45-11
Third Breakout Session: What solution-focused changes and improvements do we want to see reflected in existing legislation, regulations, processes and programming, that would prevent inter-generational experiences of homelessness?	11-12:15
Day 3: Fourth Session Discussion - October 18, 2024 (PM)	
Lunch	12:15-1:15
Fourth Breakout Session: What might implementation of a 'Duty to Assist' model, mean to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - youth and young adults - our community - service providers 	1:15-2:30
Break	2:30-2:45
Final Roundtable Discussion: What are the reasonable, minimum steps or actions, required to move this work forward?	2:45-3:45
Closing Comments	3:45-4:00

