

TO GO OR TO STAY?

To Go or To Stay? Is a qualitative community-based research project funded by a federal Homelessness Prevention Strategy grant, commencing in May 2012. It is an exploration of the relationship between risk of homelessness and the decisions of rural youth to migrate to urban centres, or alternately, not to migrate. The study will focus on south-east Ontario youth, ages 16-30, who were raised in the County of Haliburton, City of Kawartha Lakes, or Peterborough County and who either remained there or returned there after a time away (the non-migrating cohort) or who moved away and can be found in the cities of Peterborough, Lindsay or Toronto (the migrating cohort). The focus is on youth who are insecurely housed.

Thirty youth in each cohort will be interviewed individually and the conversation 'direct scribed', i.e., typed verbatim, including the interviewer's input, under editorial control of the interviewee. This raw data will be made available to a Stakeholders' Advisory Committee comprised of policy-level representatives of the service sectors that engage with this population - housing, education, employment, health and justice – in the three home counties and three reception cities. The Advisory Committee will collaboratively analyze the data to derive an understanding of the physical, psychological and social trajectories of the migration decision/s, with a view to identifying changes in policy and/or practice that would support a better outcome (i.e. reduce risk of homelessness).

These findings will then be presented to the population under study and direct service workers in a series of six focus groups, one in each of the home counties and reception cities. The intent is to re-consider the material from a lived-life perspective to amend or affirm the findings and recommendations, and perhaps add to them. These findings will be integrated into the final report.

The methodology is designed to engage a broad swath of the target community, both rural youth and the organizations and individuals that serve them, in the research process. The intent is to initiate a discussion of the issue of rural youth migration as a matter of social and economic importance to both rural and urban communities. When education and employment opportunities are not available rurally, the assumption is that rural youth have to migrate to lay a successful foundation for their adult lives. Migration is an expensive proposition, but non-migration is equally so, in a different way. Rural communities are weakened both by the loss of youth who have a successful migration and by the long-term vulnerability of those who remain with limited options. Similarly, rural youth who arrive in urban centres who do not have or cannot find the support required for them to make a successful transition become a drain on the urban society.

Fay Martin, MSW, PhD, is the Principal Investigator. Youth Emergency Shelter in Peterborough is the Host.

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