Resources

Family Frameworks

Family Systems Theory (as adapted by http://familysystemstheory.com/)

Family Systems Theory views issues (e.g. relationship problems, teenager behaviour, substance abuse, depression, etc.) in terms of the whole family instead of a ”troubled” or “bad” individual.

The focus of family systems work is to help families move away from the tendency to blame the individual (youth or caregiver) and help everyone to understand and accept his/her share of the responsibility for the conflict.

This theory implies that if one member of a family can change his/her emotional behaviour, the whole family will improve. Therefore, “Family therapy” does not necessarily mean counselling sessions with the whole family present. Working with individual members of the family can make bring about a change in the whole family.

A 17 year old young woman was referred to the Family Reconnect Program via a frontline staff member at the shelter. She had called a number of times asking for support and resources around leaving home, however she did not want to enter the shelter. After an assessment on the phone with the Family Reconnect Program the young woman shared that she would like counselling support however in her culture you did not go outside with your problems. She was afraid to tell her parents she was seeking support with the conflict at home. This young woman met with a Family Intervention Worker for over a year, and at no point did the counsellor meet with her family. However, her home life shifted drastically. By making some small changes in how she responded at home to her parents and sharing information with them, the conflict reduced and her family is now very supportive of her as she pursues her degree in psychology. This is an example of using a Family Systems Framework, in that if one person makes change it can change the whole family.
Brief Therapy/ Mediation  (as adapted from http://www.brief-therapy.com/)

In Brief Therapy/ Mediation, the approach is less about how the problem emerged, and more focused on identifying the current issue/ pattern of behaviour and finding solutions. As a result, the length of counselling is dependent on the work involved in dealing with the specific issue. Some important things to consider:

- Youth and families are the experts of their own lives
- Youth and families have the strengths and resources to change their own lives
- Repeated negative experiences often get in the way of family/youth recognizing their strengths and resources

An example; a young man and his family came to the Family Reconnect Program because the family was frustrated with the young man not coming home on time, and skipping school. Parents shared that they had tried a number of interventions including removing privileges, not giving money, etc. The young man and his family fought throughout the first session. However, over 3 sessions, a counsellor worked on stopping the yelling by asking the young man and his parents to write down requests they had of each other and post them on the fridge for the day. Once the yelling had stopped, the parents were able to hear what was happening for the young man at school and his struggles with friends. The counsellor only saw the family for 6 sessions and then they felt they were able to move forward on their own. In this example, supporting the youth and family in changing a pattern in their lives with simple suggestions on how to communicate differently shifted how the family functioned.
Therapeutic Considerations

- **Culture**: this not only include recognizing and acknowledging cultural diversity but also the consideration that every family has their own culture. That families have their own ways of interpreting and understanding how they function in the world and youth and family members are the experts in their own lives. Don’t assume you know, ask the experts.

- **Internal Bias**: whether we understand this about ourselves or not, we all have internal biases. It is important as a counsellor to understand where your internal biases lie and what your limits are. This may mean that you are not comfortable working with a family who has a history of family violence and that you may need the support of a supervisor or co-worker. Seeking support is vital in providing your best work to youth and families.

- **Building Rapport**: is an ongoing process which usually begins at the first point of contact between the counsellor and the youth and/or family members. The first impression will affect the willingness of each participant to share their thoughts or problem with the counsellor. It is important not to assume a relationship just because a youth and/or family member are calling for support.

Engaging Youth and Families in Family Counselling

“Families can be involved and compliant without being engaged. Engagement is about motivating and empowering families to recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources and to take an active role in changing things for the better. Engagement is what keeps families working in the long and sometimes slow process of positive change”. Sue Steib 2004 [http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/cvarticlesef0409.htm](http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/cvarticlesef0409.htm)

When conflict has been longstanding with youth and families engaging them in family counselling can be challenging. The PDF’s provided contain useful tips on how to engage youth and family members in the counselling process and can be useful in a variety of contexts.

* youth and family engagement in family counselling PDF
Research Articles

In this section you will find a list of research articles focused on prevention work with homeless youth.

Family Matters; Homeless Youth and Eva’s Initiatives Family Reconnect Program
Daphne Winland, Stephen Gaetz & Tara Patton York University

A key goal of this project is to create a framework that will allow others engaged in responses to youth homelessness to incorporate key elements of Family Reconnect into programmatic responses to youth homelessness in Canada. Our purpose is to shed light on how such a program can be replicated in new settings, or more broadly, be incorporated into effective systems level responses to youth homelessness.

This report profiles a unique program – Eva’s Initiatives Family Reconnect Program - that aims to address this gap. We explore key features of how the program operates, what its underlying principles are, and program outcomes in order to better understand how and in what ways the program leads to positive changes in the lives of young people who are homeless.

http://www.homelesshub.ca/familymatters

The Development of Prevention and Early Intervention Services for Homeless Youth: Intervening Successfully

Australia has some impressive programs in place to address homelessness among school-age children. Prevention programs such as school focused youth services and early intervention programs such as reconnect provide a model for other jurisdictions and would reduce youth homelessness. Effective prevention programs include broad based activities directed to all students in schools to build protection against homelessness, as well as early intervention strategies that seek to assist particular young people who are at the earliest stages of homelessness.


Targeted youth support: Rapid Evidence Assessment of effective early interventions for youth at-risk of future poor outcomes

Targeted Youth Support (TYS) is an initiative aimed at vulnerable young people and involves ensuring that agencies work together to meet young people’s needs. The initiative’s rationale is that a collaborative, joined-up approach is needed because young people may have complex and multiple needs which cannot be met by mainstream or specialist services in isolation. This report was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to explore what works for young people in relation to the outcomes prioritized by the TYS initiative.

http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=X0ohABEth04%3D&tbid=2417&language=en-US

Family life: the significance of family to homeless young people: Jennifer Monfort Published by Centrepoint in 2009

Centrepoint in the United Kingdom recently conducted research into how homeless young people understand the role of family, and why some familial relationships break down. The project also sought to understand if and how these relationships can be rebuilt.

http://www.centrepoint.org.uk/assets/documents/publications/research-reports/family-life-research-findings.pdf
Not Just Homelessness … A Study Of ‘Out Of Home’ Young People In Cork City Paula Mayock and Nicola Carr

A core objective of this research was to generate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the experiences of homelessness among young people in the Southern region of the Republic of Ireland with particular attention to Cork city. The research set out to: identify young people’s pathways or routes into homelessness, examine the experience of living out of home, examine the challenges young people experience on becoming homeless, make policy recommendations related to service provision, early intervention and the prevention of negative health outcomes.

http://www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/assets/pdf/Publications/fully.pdf
Notable Canadian Prevention Programs

Counselling services and community development

Phoenix Prevention Program

Phoenix is a non-profit, community based organization located in Halifax, Nova Scotia. They have 10 programs and services for at-risk and homeless youth, ages 12-24. The primary innovative feature at Phoenix is their continuum of care which includes: prevention, crisis assistance, emergency shelter, long-term supportive and structured living, independent living, personal skill development, education, health services and after care services. Phoenix has been recognized regionally, nationally and internationally for its work with priority youth.

Based on the stories of youth who have accessed Phoenix services over the years, and youth resilience research, Phoenix developed a Prevention Program to help address the root causes of crime and homelessness. The Phoenix Prevention Program (PPP) is comprised of a team of clinical social workers and community developers. Using models of practice that have a social justice orientation at their core, the Phoenix Prevention Program promotes a sense of confidence, competence, and connectedness in youth and their families, factors which are well known to contribute to positive development. Emphasis is placed on facilitating the healthy engagement and connection of youth with significant adults at home, at school, and in the community. The Phoenix Prevention Program has two linked components:

Clinical Therapy
The Clinical Therapy team provides free intake services and individual/family therapy for junior and senior high school students ages 12 to 19, and for youth who access Phoenix services up to the age of 24. With a focus on early intervention, we work with youth and families who are struggling with a range of concerns including family conflict, peer conflict/bullying, discrimination, grief and loss, coping with emotions, histories of abuse, and poverty.

The Clinical Therapists also assist youth and families in strengthening their connections to school and community through collaboration and advocacy, as well as through direct links with the Community Development team’s programming in selected schools and communities.

Community Development
Using a holistic model, the Community Development Team works with selected schools and communities to strengthen resilience in youth who might be considered “at-risk,” given the multiple environmental challenges they face. To achieve this, we develop meaningful relationships with selected schools and their surrounding communities. We explore their strengths and challenges, identify potential partners, and then offer programming tailored to address specific needs identified by youth, their families, schools, and communities.

School-based programming includes: themed groups for students, youth-led projects that focus on improving school climate, after-school programming/tutoring, workshops, themed youth conferences, and direct referrals to our Clinical Therapy Team. Community-based programming includes after-school and summer programming with youth and their parents (recreational, artistic, and service-oriented activities; community beautification projects; tutoring), school-community connecting initiatives, and direct referrals to our Clinical Therapy Team.
The Prevention team is connected to all the other programs at Phoenix, providing counselling to youth and their families as well as clinical consultation and workshops to Phoenix staff. The Prevention team also offers an eight-session Narrative Learning Series. This series introduces all new Phoenix staff to an approach that offers practical suggestions for working effectively and respectfully with youth, and has a strong social justice orientation at its core. This series was developed by the Clinical team at Prevention in partnership with Michael Unger, Social Work Professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax and leader of the International Resilience Project.

http://www.phoenixyouth.ca/

**Canadian School-Based Programs**

Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY)- Winnipeg, MB.

The “Life on the Streets” workshop, offered upon request, is a no-nonsense presentation that highlights the real dangers associated with street-life and is delivered by a youth from RAY’s Youth Speakers Bureau. www.rayinc.ca

Dans La Rue- Montreal, QC.

The program offered is a highly interactive session featuring a video: “Cul de Sac”, a comic book: “Cinderella’s Silence”, and lively discussions. This fast paced format helps open kids eyes to the reality of life on the streets and presents alternatives to running away. The video and teaching manual are available upon request on their website. www.danslarue.com

**Aboriginal Programming**

Abbey House, St. Catherine’s, ON

Abbey House is a 5 bedroom secured residence in a quiet residential area. Two of the bedrooms join and are used as a family suite complete with access to a private bathroom. It has a large eat in kitchen, a beautiful sitting room, a large outside deck secured back yard for children to play, laundry and internet facilities. Abbey House can have up to 10 individuals living here at one time sharing accommodations and living with mutual respect. At Abbey House they believe in the importance of relationships and will work with the young women who access their program on family reunification when possible.

**Purpose**
To provide a safe opportunity for transitional living for Aboriginal women, with or without children, who are experiencing crisis in their lives.

**Mission**
To create a nurturing, stable, and culturally based living environment that encourages and empowers individuals to make positive lasting change. Abbey House will support women and their children to overcome crisis and homelessness by assisting them to achieve emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical well being. http://www.abbeyhouse.ca/
International Prevention Programs

School based Prevention: Alone in London. – Schools Work project

The Schools Work project is aimed at young people (aged 11 to 18), in order to help them understand and address conflict issues, whether they are occurring at home or at school. The aim of the project is to: a) Prevent family breakdown and youth homelessness, b) Provide crisis intervention, c) Allow young people to be listened to, and d) Ensure that long-term support is available.
http://www.aloneinlondon.org/services/schools-work-project,1666,LA.html

Family Mediation: DePaul Trust

Reconnect is Depaul Trust’s family mediation service for homeless young people and their families. It is based in London, Kent, Oldham and Manchester and the Rochester Young Offenders Institute. The goal of the preventive program is to divert young people (aged 12 - 25) from running away, and to intervene when a family crisis threatens to lead to homelessness. They provide trained mediators to help families rebuild relationships. Where appropriate, they seek to help a young person return home, but if it is not possible or advisable to stay at home, they help them plan for a move in the future.
www.depauluk.org/whatwedo/family-mediation/

Mediation : Project SAFE, Cocoon House, Washington, USA

Cocoon Project SAFE provides intervention and support to parents experiencing difficulties with their teens. Through phone consultations and educational groups parents and guardians receive services to strengthen the family and ultimately prevent youth from leaving home. The goal is to keep families intact and youth off the streets and out of harm's way. Cocoon Project SAFE is designed to help parents and guardians to delve beyond their child's destructive behaviour patterns to expose the nature of what may be causing the behaviour. The therapist will even follow up with you to review the action plan created in the initial phone consultation and discuss ways to confront barriers that may come up. www.cocoonhouse.org/cocoon_project_safe.html

System wide approach: Reconnect Australia

The Reconnect program is a national early intervention initiative designed to reduce youth homelessness by reconnecting both homeless youth and youth who are at-risk of becoming homeless with their families, schools, and communities. The Reconnect Program targets young people aged 12-18 (and their families) who are homeless, or at-risk of homelessness. The service delivery model of Australia’s Reconnect program includes: a focus on responding quickly when a young person or family is referred; approaches that include counselling, mediation and practical support; and collaboration with other service providers. As well as providing assistance to individual young people and their families, Reconnect services provide group programs, undertake community development projects and work with other agencies to increase the broader service system’s capacity to intervene early in youth homelessness.