

Youth Emergency Shelter Review Report

**Community Strategies and Support Division
Community Partnerships Branch
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The former Minister of Children's Services, Heather Forsyth, requested that a review of youth emergency shelters in Alberta be conducted in response to concerns raised in the spring 2005 session of the Legislature about provincial funding for youth emergency shelters.

Review Process

A Youth Emergency Shelter Review Committee was established to provide input and advice about the Review process. The objectives of the Review were to:

- establish a common definition of youth emergency shelters;
- develop an inventory of youth emergency shelters;
- gather information related to usage and funding;
- identify the profile of youth served;
- identify programs and services offered by shelters; and
- make recommendations to the Minister.

The Review was carried out in five steps:

1. Conducted a scan of available ministry data/documents related to youth emergency shelters.
2. The Review Committee developed a survey.
3. Based on the survey, a common definition of youth emergency shelter was developed and the parameters of the definition were used to conduct an inventory of all youth shelter facilities in the province. The definition is as follows: "A youth emergency shelter is a safe and accessible, licensed* facility that youth, primarily between the ages of 13 to 18, who are experiencing crisis and have no alternative safe and appropriate place to go, may choose to access for short-term services. The shelter is open to all youth, and is able to provide the youth with resources and supports, or refer them to other agencies."

[* Licensed under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* or the *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act*.]

A total of 17 facilities were identified in the inventory and when tested against the parameters of the definition, eight fit the common definition. The remaining nine facilities were second stage shelters, designated Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution safe houses, longer-term residential facilities or community services where youth are placed in homes in the community or where an agency has access to local hotel rooms for emergency shelter purposes.

It was noted that the following regions do not have Youth Emergency Shelters.

- Region 7 (North Central Alberta): The region does not have a shelter but has transported youth to the Edmonton Youth Emergency Shelter, when necessary.
- Region 9 (Northeast Alberta): The region does not have a shelter but, for youth needing placement, staff members assist them with finding temporary shelter with friends or extended family. Foster care also is used occasionally.
- Region 10 (Métis Settlements): For Métis youth requiring emergency shelters, the first step is to try to re-establish connections with the family. If the youth is unwilling to return home, options such as independent living are pursued. Youth are not referred to a youth emergency shelter.

4. The following eight facilities (fitting the definition) were asked to respond to a detailed questionnaire regarding shelter funding, usage, profile of youth accessing shelter services, and programs and services.

Region 1 – Southwest Alberta	Lethbridge Youth Shelter (Lethbridge) – Wood’s Homes
Region 2 – Southeast Alberta	Inn Between Youth Shelter (Medicine Hat) – McMan Youth Services
Region 3 – Calgary and Area	Avenue 15 (Calgary) – Boys and Girls Club of Calgary
Region 3 – Calgary and Area	Exit Youth Shelter (Calgary) – Wood’s Homes
Region 4 – Central Alberta	49th Street Youth Shelter (Red Deer)
Region 6 – Edmonton and Area	Youth Emergency Shelter Society (Edmonton)
Region 6 – Edmonton and Area	Inner City Youth Housing Project (Edmonton)
Region 8 – Northwest Alberta	Sunrise House (Grande Prairie) – Grande Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter

5. Two youth focus group sessions were also conducted to obtain the perspective of youth who access shelter services.

The questionnaire and youth focus group session findings provided the basis for the development of the final report and recommendations.

Summary of Findings

The Review findings address funding and usage, youth profiles, and programs and services.

FUNDING AND USAGE

All eight shelters receive some funding from provincial sources for shelter beds and services. The Review found that the sources of shelter funding vary from region to region. Six out of the eight shelters have designated provincially funded beds. The amount of funding provided by CFSAs differs from region to region and is negotiated with each shelter. The shelters take the amount of funding provided as a ratio of their total shelter operating costs and then apply the same ratio to their total number of beds, resulting in a portion of their beds being identified as ‘designated provincially funded beds’.

Information received on shelter utilization indicates that most shelters have the capacity to accommodate the demand for beds but a few shelters experience periods where they are at or close to total shelter capacity. In 2005, the following shelters were at 90% or more capacity:

- Medicine Hat’s Inn Between Youth Shelter — April (95%), August (100%);
- Calgary Avenue 15 — January (100%), February (100%), March (90%), May (90%), June (93%), October (90%), November (95%), December (100%);
- Calgary’s Exit Youth — May (90%); and
- Edmonton’s Inner City — January (93%), February (107%), March (92%), June (93%), November (90%), December (91%).

Special populations such as teenage mothers with children and youth with disabilities face challenges when trying to access youth shelters.

The Review findings indicate that, when shelters are unable to accommodate youth, the shelters do their best to either refer youth to other agencies or work with partner agencies to assist youth they are unable to accommodate because of capacity issues or other obstacles. In 2005, 4,331 youth asked for placements in shelters. Of these, 3,832 or 88.5% were admitted and 499 or 11.5% were unable to access the shelters. The shelters indicate they are well connected to other community-based resources, which supports the coordination of services for youth at risk within and between communities.

YOUTH PROFILE

The Review found that youth who access shelters range in age from 12 to 21 years. The average age range of youth accessing shelters is 15 to 17 years. Lower ages (12 to 14) and those 18 and over are not represented in large numbers in the shelters. On a provincial scale the ratio of males to females accessing shelter services is 3:2.

Provincially, the typical male accessing shelter services is 16–17 years old and the typical female is 15–16. For the shelters who keep these statistics, the three most frequently occurring family environments identified by youth at the time they came to the shelter are Children’s Services as legal guardian, single mother as caregiver, or nuclear family. The youth is most likely to leave home as a result of conflict over rules, and before coming to the shelter, the typical youth will be in a transition stage where he/she resides with extended family or friends for up to four weeks. He/she will experience some form of exploitation (e.g., panhandling, providing sex in exchange for goods, and being forced to work for little or no pay) and will likely have engaged in some criminal activity. The youth will typically reside in the city or town where the shelter is located. It is not known where the majority of youth go after leaving the shelter as follow-up services are not currently part of youth emergency shelter operations.

The most frequent reason given by youth for coming to the shelter was conflict over rules at home, which means something different to each youth.

The largest single percentage of youth (764/3,832 or 19.9%) using emergency shelters comes from foster care/group care. Shelter operators indicate that many of these youth have complex needs and have already had a number of placements in foster and group homes. CFSAs contract with shelters to ensure youth in care (many of whom have challenging behaviours or struggle with issues such as addictions related to previous abuse and/or neglect) have a safe place to stay if their foster placements break down or they leave their placements.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Review found that since shelters are not consistent in the type of data collected about their programs and services there is little comparable provincial data for youth emergency shelters.

The majority of shelters offer programs and services such as intake, outreach services, and cultural, employment, educational and recreational programming. All of the shelters have formal and/or informal links to other community agencies and supports, and use the Canadian Accreditation Council of Human Services standards. All of the shelters have guidelines for whether or not youth who stay at the shelter must leave the facility during the day. Five of the eight shelters require youth to leave during the day. All shelters measure the effectiveness of their services in some manner; however, the process and outcomes are not consistent, which makes it difficult to obtain comparable province-wide data. All of the shelters have established actions to deal with youth who are at risk such as non-violent crisis intervention, close/continuous supervision of youth, and use of mobile and/or crisis response teams. Shelters indicate that they need additional assistance with case management practice, especially the more difficult cases, including youth in care and youth with complex needs who access shelters.

All of the shelters have minimum educational requirements for shelter staff that include a child/youth care diploma/certificate and First Aid/CPR. Opportunities for staff training and/or upgrading are offered by all the shelters. Shelter operators indicated that recruitment and retention of staff is a challenge that requires significant time and energy.

A frequent comment during the youth focus sessions was that youth want to be respected, safe, secure and supported. To support long-term success, youth said they need emotional, physical and financial support and life skills training. Youth emphasized they need support from individuals who care about them and with whom they feel comfortable talking about their situation, such as a caring shelter worker, a mentor, or a peer counsellor. Youth noted that younger youth have different needs than older youth and that shelter services and supports should be tailored or adjusted to meet the needs of the various age groups.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the Review findings.

1. That CFSAs work with youth emergency shelters to ensure contracts or agreements define program, operating and reporting standards; and to support, in partnership with other community stakeholders, a continuum of care for youth at risk and to address capacity issues that arise at the local level.
2. That youth emergency shelter governors and boards encourage connection to and partnership with the broader community service providers and develop opportunities for networking among shelters.
3. That the Department and CFSAs work with youth emergency shelters to provide advice and develop case management practices to strengthen support provided to youth with complex needs, high risk youth, and youth in care accessing the shelter.

SECTION 1 — REVIEW PROCESS

The former Minister of Children’s Services, Heather Forsyth, requested that a review of youth emergency shelters in Alberta be conducted in response to concerns raised in the spring 2005 session of the Legislature about provincial funding for youth emergency shelters.

The objectives of the Review were to:

- establish a common definition of youth emergency shelters;
- develop an inventory of youth emergency shelters;
- gather information related to usage and funding;
- identify the profile of youth served;
- identify program and services offered by shelters; and
- make recommendations to the Minister.

A Youth Emergency Shelter Review Committee (see Acknowledgments) was established to provide input and advice about the Review process. The Review Committee consisted of representatives from youth emergency shelters, Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs), Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), youth participants, and Alberta Children’s Services. Toni Lashbrook & Associates Inc. was contracted to assist with the development and distribution of survey instruments to youth emergency shelter facilities and the compilation and summary of information received.

The Review was carried out in five steps:

1. Conducted a scan of available ministry data/documents related to youth emergency shelters.
2. The Review Committee developed a survey.
3. Based on the survey, a common definition of youth emergency shelter was developed and the parameters of the definition were used to conduct an inventory of all youth shelter facilities in the province. The definition is as follows: "A youth emergency shelter is a safe and accessible, licensed* facility that youth, primarily between the ages of 13 to 18, who are experiencing crisis and have no alternative safe and appropriate place to go, may choose to access for short-term services. The shelter is open to all youth, and is able to provide the youth with resources and supports, or refer them to other agencies."

[* Licensed under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* or the *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act*.]

A total of 17 facilities were identified in the inventory and when tested against the parameters of the definition, eight fit the common definition. The remaining nine facilities were second stage shelters, designated Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution safe houses, longer-term residential facilities or community services where youth are placed in homes in the community or where an agency has access to local hotel rooms for emergency shelter purposes.

It was noted that the following regions do not have Youth Emergency Shelters.

- Region 7 (North Central Alberta): The region does not have a shelter but has transported youth to the Edmonton Youth Emergency Shelter, when necessary.
- Region 9 (Northeast Alberta): The region does not have a shelter but, for youth who need placements, staff members assist them with finding a placement with friends or extended family. Foster care also is used occasionally.
- Region 10 (Métis Settlements): For Métis youth requiring emergency shelters, the first step is to try to re-establish connections with the family. If the youth is unwilling to return home, options such as independent living are pursued. Youth are not referred to a youth emergency shelter.

4. The following eight facilities (fitting the definition) were asked to respond to a detailed questionnaire regarding shelter funding, usage, profile of youth accessing shelter services, and programs and services.

Region 1 – Southwest Alberta	Lethbridge Youth Shelter (Lethbridge) – Wood’s Homes
Region 2 – Southeast Alberta	Inn Between Youth Shelter (Medicine Hat) – McMan Youth Services
Region 3 – Calgary and Area	Avenue 15 (Calgary) – Boys and Girls Club of Calgary
Region 3 – Calgary and Area	Exit Youth Shelter (Calgary) – Wood’s Homes
Region 4 – Central Alberta	49th Street Youth Shelter (Red Deer)
Region 6 – Edmonton and Area	Youth Emergency Shelter Society (Edmonton)
Region 6 – Edmonton and Area	Inner City Youth Housing Project (Edmonton)
Region 8 – Northwest Alberta	Sunrise House (Grande Prairie) – Grande Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter

5. Two youth focus group sessions were also conducted to obtain the perspective of youth who access shelter services. A total of 16 participants attended one session in Calgary and one in Grande Prairie.

SECTION 2 — REVIEW FINDINGS

The data collected from the questionnaire and the youth focus group sessions provides the basis for the following Review findings.

Findings – Funding and Usage

NUMBER OF BEDS

The following table illustrates the number of designated provincially funded beds and the total number of beds for each shelter.

Shelter	Number of Designated Provincially Funded Beds	Total Number of Beds
Lethbridge Youth Shelter	0	8
Inn Between Youth Shelter	4	6
Avenue 15	4	15
Exit Youth Shelter	10	15
49th Street Youth Shelter	8	8
Youth Emergency Shelter Society	12	28
Inner City Youth Housing Project	27	29
Sunrise House*	0	10
Total	65	119

* The CFSA does not provide funding to Sunrise House in Grande Prairie but has a standing offer with Sunrise House to pay \$200 per day for shelter services accessed by youth in care of the Director.

The Review found that the sources of shelter funding vary from region to region. Six out of the eight shelters have designated provincially funded beds. The amount of funding provided by CFSA's differs from region to region and is negotiated with each shelter. The shelters then take the amount of funding provided as a ratio of their total shelter operating costs and then apply the same ratio to their total number of beds, resulting in a portion of their beds being identified as 'designated provincially funded beds'.

COST OF SHELTER BEDS

The following chart illustrates the estimated costs per bed which were derived by taking the total shelter budget and dividing this number by the annual bed nights (365 x total # of beds).

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (annual bed nights are calculated by multiplying # of beds x 365 days)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night (total shelter budget ÷ annual bed nights)
Southwest Alberta CFSA (Region 1)	Lethbridge Youth Shelter	8 Annual bed nights=2,920	0	\$280,000	\$80,000 (28.5%)	\$95.89
Southeast Alberta CFSA (Region 2)	Inn Between Youth Shelter Services	6 Annual bed nights=2,190	4	\$206,980	\$166,980 (80%)	\$94.51
Calgary and Area CFSA (Region 3)	Avenue 15	15 Annual bed nights=5,475	4	\$360,000	\$261,710 (73%)	\$65.75
Calgary and Area CFSA (Region 3)	Exit Youth Shelter	15 Annual bed nights=5,475	10	\$409,142	\$339,070 (83%)	\$74.73
Central Alberta CFSA (Region 4)	49 th St Youth Shelter	8 Annual bed nights=2,920	8	\$538,452	\$487,295 (90%)	\$184.40*
Edmonton and Area CFSA (Region 6)	Youth Emergency Shelter Society	28 Annual bed nights=10,220	12	\$1,475,260	\$487,856 (33%)	\$144.35
Edmonton and Area CFSA (Region 6)	Inner City Youth Housing Project	29 Annual bed nights=10,585	27	\$1,040,000	\$878,940 (84%)	\$98.25
Northwest Alberta CFSA (Region 8)	Sunrise House	10 Annual bed nights=3,650	0	\$350,000	\$37,936 (11%)	\$95.89
Total		119	65	\$4,659,834	\$2,739,787 (59%)	

*The estimated cost per bed for 49th Street Youth Shelter may be high as the shelter budget includes components for an outreach worker position and a youth in transition program that can be accessed by youth at the shelter, as well as youth in the community via the youth in transitions program worker.

Operational Costs

There is significant variation in the sources of operational funding for shelters. There is no consistent definition of operating/program expenditures. Based on information provided by each shelter, the following chart identifies the percentage of the shelter's core operational costs that receive ongoing funding.

Shelter	Percentage of Operational Costs Receiving Ongoing Funding	Source of Ongoing Funding
Lethbridge Youth Shelter	29%	Southwest Alberta CFSA
Inn Between Youth Shelter	100%	Southeast Alberta CFSA; Human Resources and Social Development Canada
Avenue 15	75%	Calgary and Area CFSA; United Way
Exit Youth Shelter	88%	Calgary and Area CFSA; City of Calgary, FCSS
49 th Street Youth Shelter	90%	Central Alberta CFSA, FCSS
Youth Emergency Shelter	33%	Edmonton and Area CFSA; United Way
Inner Youth Housing Project	84%	Edmonton and Area CFSA
Sunrise House	21%	Northwest Alberta CFSA; FCSS

CAPACITY

Usage and Length of Stay

Since shelter usage is driven by local area needs rather than provincial trends, there is no consistent pattern of usage over time between all of the shelters. At the youth focus group sessions, youth talked about the need for the length of stay to be flexible enough to meet the varying needs of youth who access shelter services.

The following chart outlines the monthly average number of youth in the shelter, average number of bed nights used, and annual average bed utilization for 2005.

Shelter	Monthly average number of youth in the shelter (2005)	Monthly average bed nights used/month (2005)	Annual average bed utilization (2005)
Lethbridge Youth Shelter	18	135	55%
Inn Between Youth Shelter	6	107	64%
Avenue 15	68	411	90%
Exit Youth Shelter	65	327	72%
49 th Street Youth Shelter	24	139	57%
Youth Emergency Shelter	63	486	57%
Inner City Youth Housing Project	53	756	85%
Sunrise House	87	28	29%

Utilization

The following chart illustrates the utilization reported for 2005. The months when shelters were filled to capacity or utilization was 90% or higher, are highlighted in the chart.

Month (2005)	Lethbridge	Inn Between	Avenue 15	Exit Youth	49th Street	Youth Emergency	Inner City	Sunrise House
Jan.	30% 75/248	79% 147/186	100% 465/465	46.5% 216/465	21% 52/248	57% 494/868	93% 836/899	10% 30/310
Feb.	35% 78/224	57% 96/168	100% 420/420	80% 336/420	24% 54/224	62% 487/784	107% 869/812	18% 50/280
March	62% 154/248	20% 37/186	90% 418/465	86% 400/465	58% 144/248	62% 535/868	92% 827/899	20% 62/310
April	63% 151/240	95% 171/180	85% 382/450	61.5% 277/450	40% 96/240	57% 478/840	81% 705/870	24% 72/300
May	52% 129/248	84% 156/186	90% 418/465	90% 419/465	58% 143/248	59% 515/868	78% 701/899	19% 59/310
June	49% 118/240	20% 36/180	93% 419/450	76% 344/450	63% 151/240	62% 524/840	93% 809/870	39% 117/300
July	53% 131/248	77% 143/186	80% 372/465	59.5% 277/465	60% 149/248	59% 514/868	73% 656/899	13% 40/310
Aug.	57% 141/248	100% 186/186	75% 349/465	67% 312/465	81% 201/248	57% 496/868	65% 584/899	23% 71/310
Sept.	36% 89/248	53% 95/180	85% 382/450	67.5% 304/450	73% 175/240	58% 503/868	79% 687/870	35% 105/300
Oct.	63% 156/248	45% 84/186	90% 418/465	72% 335/465	77% 191/248	59% 509/868	89% 800/899	27% 84/310
Nov.	83% 199/240	62% 112/180	95% 428/450	77% 347/450	85% 204/240	46% 385/840	90% 783/870	52% 156/300
Dec.	81% 201/248	12% 23/186	100% 465/465	78% 363/465	43% 107/248	46% 396/868	91% 818/899	63% 195/310
Annual bed nights	2,920 (8 beds)	2,190 (6 beds)	5,475 (15 beds)	5,475 (15 beds)	2,920 (8 beds)	10,220 (28 beds)	10,585 (29 beds)	3,650 (10 beds)

Not Admitted to the Shelter

The total number of youth not admitted to shelters across Alberta in 2005 was 499. In 2005, 4,331 youth asked for placements in shelters; of these 3,832 or 88.5% were admitted and 499 or 11.5% were not admitted. The top five reasons for not being admitted are shown below. Only 157/4,331 or 3.6% were not admitted because the shelter was filled to capacity.

Top 5 Reasons for Not Being Admitted to a Shelter	# of Youth Not Admitted for this reason	# of Youth Not Admitted Compared to total asking for placements
Shelter filled to capacity	157/499 (31.5%)	157/4,331 (3.6%)
Referred to another agency*	144/499 (28.8%)	144/4,331 (3.3%)
Intoxicated or under the influence of drugs	72/499 (14.4%)	72/4,331 (1.7%)
Too old	62/499 (12.4%)	62/4,331 (1.4%)
Unwilling to follow shelter rules	34/499 (6.8%)	34/4,331 (0.79%)
* Youth are referred to another agency when shelter staff determine, through intake processes, the youth will be better served by another agency (e.g., treatment centre for addictions, women's emergency shelter).		

Shelter Filled to Capacity

The following shelters were at 90% or more capacity in 2005:

- Medicine Hat's Inn Between Youth Shelter — April (95%), August (100%);
- Calgary Avenue 15 — January (100%), February (100%), March (90%), May (90%), June (93%), October (90%), November (95%), December (100%);
- Calgary's Exit Youth — May (90%); and
- Edmonton's Inner City — January (93%), February (107%), March (92%), June (93%), November (90%), December (91%).

Referred to Another Agency

At the youth focus sessions, youth talked about the lack of consistency among shelters regarding reasons for not being admitted to a shelter. One barrier/obstacle for youth accessing shelter services is finding a shelter that will accommodate a teenage mother with children. Teenage mothers with children tend to be accommodated at women's shelters rather than at youth emergency shelters, as women's shelters are better equipped to handle the needs of young children and provide a more appropriate environment.

Although the incidence is low, shelters report difficulties in accommodating youth who have disabilities that limit physical access, since not all existing youth emergency shelters are wheelchair accessible. Calgary's Avenue 15, Calgary's Exit Youth Shelter, Red Deer's 49th Street Youth Shelter, Edmonton's Inner City Youth Housing Project and Grande Prairie's Sunrise House are not wheelchair accessible. For those few youth with physical disabilities who

request accommodations at shelters, shelters note that this is not usually an issue as there are programs and services available from other sources for youth with disabilities, such as those offered through the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Program.

When shelters are unable to accommodate youth, the shelters do their best to refer the youth to other agencies or they work with other partner agencies to meet the needs of the youth. Youth emergency shelters indicate they are well connected to other community-based resources, which supports the coordination of services for youth at risk within and between communities.

Findings – Youth Profile

NUMBER OF MALES AND FEMALES

Provincially, more males than females access youth emergency shelter services. In 2005, out of 3,832 youth, 2,376 or 62% of males and 1,456 or 38% of females accessed shelter services.

AGES OF YOUTH

The average age of youth staying in shelters is between 15 to 17 years. The greatest numbers of males who stay in shelters are between 16 to 17 years and the greatest numbers of females who stay in shelters are between 15 to 16 years. The age of youth, both male and female, least likely to stay in a shelter is 12 years, followed closely by 18 years.

At the youth focus sessions, youth recognized the difficulty shelters have in accommodating youth of different ages and backgrounds. One youth said, “You can’t design rules for everyone, when one group is entrenched in the street and one group is not. We’re also different ages. The rules a 12-year-old needs are not the same for an 18-year-old”.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS

As a provincial average, respondents identified Alberta Children’s Services (Legal Guardian) as the most frequent family environment for youth prior to coming to the shelter. The largest single percentage of youth (764 or 19.9%) using emergency shelters comes from foster care/group care. Shelter operators indicate that many of these youth have complex needs and have already had a number of placements in foster or group care. CFSAs contract with shelters to ensure youth in care (many of whom have challenging behaviours or struggle with issues such as addictions related to previous abuse and/or neglect) have a safe place to stay if their foster placements break down or they leave their placements.

The second most frequent family environment is a single mother (437 or 11.4%). The third most frequent family environment is nuclear family (419 or 10.9%). Youth respondents commented that some parents tell them that they are being sent to a youth shelter until they stabilize.

REASON FOR COMING TO THE SHELTER

Many youth who are accommodated in youth emergency shelters experience a transition stage and do not come directly to the shelter. The most common length of time youth stayed elsewhere before coming to the shelter is two to four weeks.

The most frequent reason given for coming to a shelter was conflict over rules at home (1,226 or 32%). Youth respondents indicated that the term ‘conflict over the rules’ does not clearly reflect the severity or types of the conflict that caused youth to leave home. They indicated that the types of conflict are such that they do not feel safe or cared for.

The second most common reason given for coming to a shelter was addiction problems (788 or 20.6%). Addiction problems include youth addictions, as well as the presence of addictive behaviour by others in the home, including the parent/caregiver, which results in failure to provide a safe environment and the necessities of life (i.e., food, clothing, shelter).

The third most common reason was abuse in the home (394 or 10.3%), followed by homeless for an extended period of time (337 or 8.8%). At the youth focus sessions, one youth said that 15 to 16 year olds, who are homeless, do not want to go home because they do not feel comfortable being there.

Shelters reported that 709 or 18.5% of youth had experienced some form of exploitation; 364 or 9.5% were engaged in prostitution; and 1,070 or 27.9% had been engaged in criminal activity. Youth respondents stressed the need for shelters to be safe and secure places for them to stay. Out of 3,832 youth, the majority (2,195 or 57.3%) of youth who stay at shelters come from the city in which the shelter is located. Only 298 or 7.8% come from other cities or towns in the region in which the shelter is located. Also, only 24 or approximately .63% of youth who stay at shelters come from rural areas and/or reserves outside of the region in which the shelter is located.

Destination after Leaving

Shelters do not consistently track information related to youth placements following their stay at the youth shelter. The most frequently reported destinations are listed below.

Shelter	Destination After Leaving the Shelter	Highest Percentage
Sunrise House	Reunited with family	70%
Inn Between Youth Shelter	Living with extended family or friends	42.9%
Lethbridge Youth Shelter	Independent living without support	40%
Inner City Youth Housing Project	Transferred to an alternative facility	39%
Avenue 15	Unknown	38%
Exit Youth Shelter	Unknown	37%
49th Street Youth Shelter	Unknown	35%
Youth Emergency Shelter Society	Unknown	27.7%

Findings — Programs and Services

Shelters offer the following services (number of shelters offering the service is in brackets):

- intake (8/8);
- outreach (5/8);
- culturally specific services (5/8);
- employment programs (4/8);
- recreation programs (4/8);
- services for youth with disabilities (3/8); and
- educational programs (2/8).

Grande Prairie's Sunrise House indicated that all of the services are offered as referrals to other agencies and/or informal programming because they have no formally funded programs. Youth respondents talked about the need for shelters to exercise flexibility in requiring youth of all ages to participate in mandatory job programs. They stressed the need to have some time to adapt and receive support in dealing with their crisis situation before they are required to participate in job search activities. They also said that they want to continue their schooling, need life skills training, and would like more recreational and creative opportunities (art, music and drama).

All of the shelters use the Canadian Accreditation Council of Human Services standards. Some of the youth shelters, such as Edmonton's Youth Emergency Shelter Society and Grande Prairie's Sunrise House, are independently incorporated organizations. Other youth shelters operate as programs within a larger organization. For example, the Lethbridge Youth Shelter is part of Wood's Homes. Edmonton's Inner City Youth Housing Project, is a partnership among several agencies that work with youth in Edmonton. These varied structures affect the number of programs that youth can access through a shelter.

FORMAL LINKS TO OTHER AGENCIES AND SUPPORTS

Some of the shelters have a 'safe accommodation' mandate only, while others incorporate additional programs and services. All of the shelters, except one, are integrated with other service providers in the community. Six of the eight shelters have memberships in other associations. Some shelters access resources through organizations of which they are a part, while others access community resources.

LEAVING THE FACILITY DURING THE DAY

Youth respondents stressed the need for shelters to exercise flexibility in requiring all youth, regardless of age or individual circumstances, to participate in mandatory day programs.

While they differ, all of the shelters have guidelines for whether or not youth who stay at the shelter must leave the facility during the day. The Lethbridge Youth Shelter, Medicine Hat's Inn Between Youth Shelter, Calgary's Exit Youth Shelter, Edmonton's Youth Emergency Shelter Society and Grande Prairie's Sunrise House, require youth to leave during the day. Edmonton's Youth Emergency Shelter Society will make exceptions if the temperature is -25 degrees Celsius or the client has a meeting with a shelter worker or onsite appointments with other professionals. Calgary's Avenue 15 allows youth who are not able to participate in day programs to remain at the shelter. Red Deer's 49th Street Youth Shelter recognizes individual circumstances, such as illness, safety, and stabilization needs and takes each individual's circumstances into account regarding participation in day programs. Edmonton's Inner City Youth Housing Project has no requirement for youth to be out of the shelter during the day.

MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES

Although all of the shelters measure the effectiveness of their services, there are no common measures so it is difficult to obtain consistent provincial data on outcomes of services. Youth shelters most frequently use the Canadian Outcomes Research Institute database to measure the effectiveness of their services. A wide range of methods utilized by the shelters include:

- youth satisfaction surveys;
- parent satisfaction surveys;
- follow up with youth and family;
- quality and safety reporting;
- outcome measurement tools; and
- monitoring of the success of daily action plans.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

All shelters have specific education requirements for staff, i.e., requiring at least a diploma in the human services for front-line staff. Degrees are required for positions such as supervisors and executive directors. The Lethbridge Youth Shelter, Red Deer's 49th Street Youth Shelter and Grande Prairie's Sunrise House require additional training such as First Aid/CPR, non-violent crisis intervention, suicide prevention/intervention and Aboriginal awareness training. Calgary's Avenue 15, Red Deer's 49th Street Youth Shelter, Edmonton's Inner City Youth Housing Project, and Edmonton's Youth Emergency Shelter Society have requirements about related experience.

Shelter operators indicated that the recruitment and retention of staff is a challenge that requires significant time and energy. All of the shelters provide opportunities for staff training and upgrading. Collectively, these opportunities include staff training and development allowances; mandatory training for accreditation or contractual requirements; and guest speakers at staff meetings. All shelters offer some form of diversity training/support including cultural diversity training and Aboriginal awareness training. All shelters either provide training or have staff trained in working with persons with disabilities and with behavioural/mental health issues.

Findings – Youth Emergency Shelter Operators

Shelter operators indicated that the three greatest challenges facing shelters are in the areas of:

- staffing — recruitment, retention, safety, and training [4/8];
- funding —the need for predictable and sustainable funding [3/8]; and
- a shortage of treatment facilities in communities to address addiction issues [2/8].

Findings – Youth Sessions

The Youth Focus Group Sessions were held in Calgary on July 25, 2006 and in Grande Prairie on July 28, 2006. Sixteen participants (12 youth – ages 13 to 24, and four workers – ages 22 to 28) responded to the following questions:

- What’s working well at the youth emergency shelter?
- What’s not working well at the youth emergency shelter?
- What needs to change?
- If you were going to build a shelter what would you include?
- What are the rules in the new shelter?
- What long-term supports do you need to succeed?
- What do the workers need to succeed?

Youth need support to make a successful transition back to the community. Youth indicated that they want:

- shelters to connect them with other resources;
- caring staff that listen and work closely with them to address their situation (more one-on-one time);
- additional supports for their addiction problems;
- an adequate number of staff who can relate to their situation, and help them to get out of crisis and reintegrate into the community (e.g., peer counsellors and mentors help youth to see what success looks like);
- a stable place to stay that meets their basic needs (e.g., food, a safe place, privacy/personal space);
- to participate in educational, recreational and cultural activities when staying in a shelter;
- to be treated with understanding and respect, and as individuals with differing needs (e.g., limits on length of stay and mandatory day programs do not recognize the needs of youth in crisis); and
- to develop a foundation, such as cooking, life skills, and education, that will help them succeed in the community.

SECTION 3— CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The conclusions based on the Review findings are as follows.

- All shelters receive funding from provincial sources for beds and shelter services depending on regional needs. In 2005/2006 Alberta Children's Services provided \$2.73 million and in 2006/2007 \$3.1 million to the eight shelters based on regional budgets. Six out of eight shelters also receive funding from other sources such as federal funding (Human Resources and Social Development Canada), the United Way, municipalities, and Family and Community Support Services programs.
- In 2005, the estimated cost of a shelter bed for one person per night ranges from \$65.75 to \$184.40 with the provincial average being \$106.72 (differences reflect variation in the delivery of local programs and operating costs).
- Information received from four shelters indicates that they experience periods when they are at 90% or higher utilization.
- The age range for youth accessing shelters is 12 to 21 years. Very few youth are turned away because of age, especially those who are too young to enter the shelter. The typical range of ages of youth accessing the shelters is 15 to 17 years. Lower ages (e.g., 12) and higher (e.g., 18) are not represented in large numbers in the shelters.
- About 27.9% (1,070) of youth who come to shelters have engaged in some form of criminal activity and 18.5% (709) have experienced some form of exploitation, other than prostitution.
- The largest single percentage of youth (764 or 19.9%) using emergency shelters comes from foster care/group care. Shelter operators indicate that many of these youth have complex needs and have already had a number of placements in foster or group care. CFSAs contract with shelters to ensure youth in care, many of whom have challenging behaviours or struggle with issues such as addictions related to previous abuse and/or neglect, have a safe place to stay if their foster placements break down or they leave their placements.
- The varied organizational/governance models of shelters reflects the flexibility communities need to address their responsibility for the accommodation of children and youth who may require services but who are not in the care of the government.
- Youth living outside the areas where shelters exist have limited access to youth emergency shelter services. There is not data available on youth who reside in regions where shelter services are not located. It is unclear whether a need for shelter space exists in rural Alberta or whether the connections and relationships between community agencies create sufficient options to meet the needs of rural youth to find safe temporary placements.

- Shelters indicate that the length of stay in a shelter needs to be flexible to be individually responsive to the needs of youth, and to recognize different community needs and capacity. Youth agree that shelter rules should be flexible enough to fit the wide range of ages staying at the shelter. Youth indicate that having set limits on length of stay and mandatory day programs do not recognize the needs of youth in crisis.
- Review Committee members indicated that shelters may benefit from transition plans for youth leaving the shelter.
- Review Committee members believe it may be beneficial for shelters to receive assistance from Child and Family Services Authorities with case management practice, especially with the more difficult cases.
- Although all of the shelters measure the effectiveness of their services, there are no common measures, so it is difficult to obtain consistent provincial data on the outcomes of the service.
- All of the shelters are either accredited or working toward accreditation with the Canadian Accreditation Council of Human Services and follow their standards for youth shelter programs.
- Shelter operators indicated that the recruitment and retention of staff is a challenge that requires significant time and energy. All of the shelters have specific educational requirements for staff and offer training. Youth want an adequate number of staff who can relate to their situation and can assist them in getting out of crisis and transition back into the community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the Review findings.

1. That CFSAs work with youth emergency shelters to ensure contracts or agreements define program, operating and reporting standards; and to support, in partnership with other community stakeholders, a continuum of care for youth at risk and to address capacity issues that arise at the local level.
2. That youth emergency shelter governors and boards encourage connection to and partnership with the broader community service providers and develop opportunities for networking among shelters.
3. That the Department and CFSAs work with youth emergency shelters to provide advice and develop case management practices to strengthen support provided to youth with complex needs, high risk youth, and youth in care accessing the shelter.

APPENDIX A — FINDINGS — REPORTED BY SHELTER

LETHBRIDGE YOUTH SHELTER (WOOD'S HOMES) – LETHBRIDGE

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=15.3; Female=15.4.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=14; Female=15.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12; Female=12 and 18.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Resided with friends.
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Conflict over rules at home.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Foster Care or Youth Justice.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter	Independent living without support.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake and employment programs.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Must leave during the day.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addressed the needs of youth experiencing barriers by referring the youth or arranging support from other agencies or from within the agency.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	None.

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Southwest Alberta CFSA (Region 1)	Lethbridge Youth Shelter	8 Annual bed nights=2,920	0	\$280,000	\$80,000 (28.5%)	\$95.89

INN BETWEEN YOUTH SHELTER (MCMAN YOUTH SERVICES) – MEDICINE HAT

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=15.6; Female=15.3.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=17; Female=15.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12 and 18; Female=12 and 18.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Nuclear (both parents present) and single parent with mother as caregiver.
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Conflict over rules at home.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Directly from home.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter	Living with extended family or friends.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake, outreach, culturally specific services, employment programs and recreational programs.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Must leave during the day.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addresses the needs of youth experiencing barriers by contacting agencies within the surrounding area to assist the youth.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	April (95%); August (100%).

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Southeast Alberta CFSA (Region 2)	Inn Between Youth Shelter Services	6 Annual bed nights=2,190	4	\$206,980	\$166,980 (80%)	\$94.51

AVENUE 15 (BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF CALGARY) – CALGARY

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=15.3; Female=15.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=15; Female=14.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12 and 18; Female=18.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Nuclear - both parents present.
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Conflict over rules at home.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Directly from home.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter	Unknown.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake, outreach, culturally specific services, services for youth with disabilities, educational, employment and recreational programs.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Youth who are not able to participate in Avenue 15 community day programs can stay in the shelter during the day.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addressed the needs of youth experiencing barriers by providing referrals to more appropriate resources and programs within the community.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	January (100%); February (100%); March (90%); May (90%); June (93%); October (90%); November (95%); December (100%).

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Calgary and Area CFSA (Region 3)	Avenue 15	15 Annual bed nights=5,475	4	\$360,000	\$261,710 (73%)	\$65.75

EXIT YOUTH SHELTER (WOOD’S HOMES) – CALGARY

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=15.8; Female=15.4.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=17; Female=16.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12; Female=12.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Alberta Children’s Services as Legal Guardian (Child Protection).
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Conflict over rules at home (30%) and youth has addiction problems.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Unknown.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter	Unknown.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake, outreach, culturally specific services, services for youth with disabilities and recreation programs.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Must leave during the day.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addressed the needs of teenage mothers with children through the existing partnership with the Calgary YMCA which allows for direct referral to the Mary Dover House if a youth is over 18 years of age.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	May (90%).

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Calgary and Area CFSA (Region 3)	Exit Youth Shelter	15 Annual bed nights=5,475	10	\$409,142	\$339,070 (83%)	\$74.73

49TH STREET YOUTH SHELTER – RED DEER

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=15.6; Female=15.2.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=16; Female=16.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=18; Female=18.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Single parent with mother as caregiver.
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Conflict over rules at home.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Stayed with extended family or friends.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter	Unknown.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake, outreach, culturally specific services and services for youth with disabilities.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	The shelter is flexible and takes each individual's situation/circumstances into consideration.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addressed the needs of teenage mothers with children by referring the youth to appropriate resources such as the Women's Shelter and People's Place that accommodate women with children.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	None. The shelter has four crisis or community beds and four beds which are used primarily for stabilization and transition purposes for youth in care. These beds can be accessed as "overflow" beds for crisis care when they are not being used. Utilization of the crisis beds averages at 90% annually.

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Central Alberta CFSA (Region 4)	49 th Street Youth Shelter	8 Annual bed nights=2,920	8	\$538,452	\$487,295 (90%)	\$184.40*

* The estimated cost per bed may be high as the shelter budget includes components for an outreach worker position and a youth in transition program that can be accessed both by youth at the shelter, as well as youth in the community via the youth in transitions program worker.

YOUTH EMERGENCY SHELTER SOCIETY – EDMONTON

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=16.9; Female=16.3.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=17; Female=16.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12 and 13; Female=12 and 13.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Resided with friends (31%) and Alberta Children’s Services as Legal Guardian (Child Protection).
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Youth was homeless.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Foster care or other child protection facility.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter –	Unknown.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake, outreach, educational and employment programs.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Must leave during the day, unless temperature is -25°C or colder or the client has a meeting with a shelter worker or onsite appointments with other professionals.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addressed the needs of youth experiencing barriers by referring youth to the Shelter’s Outreach Services, in-house AADAC workers, and to other outside agencies or services.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	None.

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Edmonton and Area CFSA (Region 6)	Youth Emergency Shelter Society	28 Annual bed nights=10,220	12	\$1,475,260	\$487,856 (33%)	\$144.35

INNER CITY YOUTH HOUSING PROJECT

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=16; Female=15.8.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=16; Female=16.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12, 13 and 18; Female=12, 13, and 18.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Alberta Children’s Services as Legal Guardian (Child Protection).
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Youth was homeless.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Foster Care.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter –	Transferred to another facility.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Intake, outreach and culturally specific services.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Do not have to leave during the day.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter cannot accommodate youth with physical disabilities and is unable to accommodate “high needs” youth (e.g., violent, suicidal, behavioural problems, mental health issues, etc.) because of its staffing model. Youth are transitioned to other organizations within Region 6 that provide housing and resources for this purpose.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	January (93%); February (107%); March (92%); June (93%); November (90%); December (91%).

Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Edmonton and Area CFSA (Region 6)	Inner City Youth Housing Project	29 Annual bed nights=10,585	27	\$1,040,000	\$878,940 (84%)	\$98.25

SUNRISE HOUSE (GRANDE PRAIRIE YOUTH EMERGENCY SHELTER) – GRANDE PRAIRIE

Average Age of Males and Females in the Shelter	Male=15.8; Female=15.8.
Age with the Greatest Number of Youth	Male=15; Female=15.
Age with the Least Number of Youth	Male=12; Female=12.
Most Frequent Family Environment when Youth came to the Shelter	Blended - with natural mother or father.
Most Frequent Reason Given by Youth for Coming to the Shelter	Conflict over rules at home.
Most Frequent Location Where Youth Stayed before Coming to the Shelter	Couch surfing – stay wherever you can.
Most Frequent Destination after Leaving the Shelter –	Reunited with family.
Programs and Services Offered at the Shelter	Referrals to other agencies and informal programming. The Shelter does not have any formally funded programs at this time.
Rules About Youth Leaving the Shelter During the Day	Must leave during the day.
Barriers to Accessing Shelter Services	The shelter addressed the needs of youth experiencing barriers by referring them to other agencies.
Bed Utilization in 2005 (Months in which capacity was over 90%)	None.

Child and Family Services Authority(CFSA)	Shelter	Shelter Capacity (total # of shelter beds)	# of designated provincially funded shelter beds	2005-2006 Shelter Budget	2005-2006 Funding Provided by CFSA (% of total budget)	Estimated cost per bed night
Northwest Alberta CFSA (Region 8)	Sunrise House	10 Annual bed nights=3,650	0	\$350,000	\$37,936 (11%)	\$95.89