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Youth in Calgary's Housing Programs: A Case Study

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is increasing awareness that homeless youth face very different challenges than homeless adults do. With this awareness comes the recognition that housing programs for youth must be designed and developed differently to meet their unique needs.

Unlike many adults who are homeless due to job loss or their inability to pay rent, homeless youth typically have never lived independently. Complicating their situations further, many of these young people were involved with the child welfare system, with childhood trauma still fresh from the recent past and have little, if any, experience budgeting, working or using support networks.

This paper reports on how youth fared in Calgary, Alberta's housing programs between 2012 and 2018. The study examined anonymized data describing 644 young people aged 15 to 24, who participated in a mix of programs. Many of these youth had complex needs: 67 per cent reported mental health issues, 59 per cent reported substance use issues and nearly half reported both. Police interactions and hospital visits were also common prior to program entry. Twenty-nine per cent of youth in the study identified as Indigenous.

The study's outcomes were encouraging. Of the 531 youth with clearly identified exits from the program, 61 per cent remained housed — either remaining in the program or moving to permanent housing without support. An important feature of our study is the ability to observe youth for as long as six to seven years. Those who we were able to observe for only a short period (one to two years) had an 80-per-cent success rate. The rate of success was lower for youth observed for longer periods, settling at around 60 per cent for youth observed for up to five to six years. The high rate of success in Calgary's housing programs comes despite the program choosing high-acuity youth with significant histories of addiction, mental health issues and frequent police encounters.

Ours is a case study of Calgary's housing programs for youth. As such, we cannot offer commentary on the effectiveness of youth programs in other jurisdictions populated by youth with different personal or experiential characteristics from those enrolled in Calgary's program. We can, however, suggest that the evidence from Calgary is that a program offering even high-acuity youth housing without preconditions can realize an impressive rate of success and can do so even when evaluated over a long period. While this is a case study of housing programs in Calgary, it will nonetheless be valuable for other jurisdictions to use in designing programs and developing policies to assist youth experiencing homelessness.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a case study examining the success realized by youth enrolled in a large, community-based housing program in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Semborski et al. (2021) have recently noted the need for empirical research to generate evidence of the effectiveness of housing programs in assisting youth. This paper is a response to that call for evidence.

The evaluation of the success of housing programs for youth as opposed to adults is important because the reasons youth and adults enter homelessness, how they experience homelessness and the recency of shared causes of homelessness are different. Most adults enter homelessness because of losing employment or being priced out of housing (Infrastructure Canada 2024). However, this is rarely true of youth who typically enter homelessness without prior experience living independently, without having established employment, managed a budget or having built a network of supports (Gaetz 2014; Zerger, Stehlow and Gundlapalli 2008). Thus, they are experiencing homelessness during a time when they have yet to establish and maintain housing. Finally, Gaetz et al. (2016) report that in Canada in 2016, 57.8 per cent of youth experiencing homelessness have a history with child welfare. This history and their experiences with child welfare and childhood trauma are more recent than for those adults who may have experienced these traumas. For all these reasons, there are grounds for believing that the success of youth in≈a housing program may differ from the success realized by adults.

We examine a housing program in a non-experimental setting and evaluate the housing success youth realized over as long as seven years. In terms of both setting and time span of analysis, our evaluation is a departure from analyses of data drawn from controlled experiments of limited duration. For example, Kozloff et al. (2016) report evidence from the At Home/Chez Soi (AHCS) demonstration project (Goering et al. 2014), which examined a housing program true to the Pathways Housing First (PHF) model envisioned by Tsemberis, Gulcur and Nakae (2004). They show such a program is effective at keeping formerly homeless youth in housing but is limited in that the study observes youth for only 24 months and does so under conditions that may not be observed outside a demonstration project. Observing youth for as long as seven years enables us to define success based on two elements: the type of housing they establish and the length of time they remain housed. We discuss our measures of success in greater detail below.

As Pleace (2011) and O'Flaherty (2019) note, there is now a plethora of housing programs which, while sharing the philosophy of housing without preconditions, have drifted a good distance from the PHF model.[1] Evaluating a housing program in Ottawa, Samosh et al. (2018) identify deviations in program design from the PHF model originating in funding constraints, lack of availability of private rental accommodations and rent supplements, the level of experience of program leadership and front-line case managers and the program clients' characteristics. Thus, strict adherence to the PHF model, while possible in a controlled experiment, is less likely to be realized in a non-experimental setting where program design meets budget and other constraints. In this paper, we examine the success of a housing program for youth that shares the PHF model's philosophy of providing housing without preconditions but does not strictly adhere to all elements of that model's program design.

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[1]　Pleace (2011) notes that the PHF model is not presented as a solution to all forms of homelessness. Rather, it is aimed at assisting people experiencing chronic homelessness and who make disproportionate use of emergency departments, suffer substance abuse and mental health problems and who cycle in and out of jails because of petty criminality. Those placed in PHF programs are housed in scattered-site settings and must commit to devoting 30 per cent of their income to paying rent, either directly or indirectly, to a private landlord. In application, many programs identifying as Housing First applications deviate some considerable distance from these ideals and include programs offering housing in congregate settings, without requirements to pay rent. They even impose a version of the so-called staircase model requiring clients to satisfy certain preconditions before receiving further support, something anathema to the PHF model. The Pathways Housing First program has responded to these developments by publishing a fidelity scale to access how far programs deviate from the ideals of the PHF model (Stefancic et al. 2013).

We use administrative datasets describing the experiences of youth with a variety of personal characteristics, homeless experiences and interactions with the health and justice systems. We report the frequency of these interactions by youth chosen for housing programs and comment on the implications for the cost of housing programs meant to assist youth. This is important because the business case presented to governments funding housing programs is that the substantial costs of these programs can be wholly or in part offset by savings realized by the health and justice systems and by government-funded shelter operators.[2] In section 7, we discuss the competing priorities that arise for government when a housing program's choice of clients may generate cost savings to the program but imposes greater costs on other elements of the public sector.

In the next section, we briefly describe the homeless-serving sector, the state of homelessness, the types of housing programs serving youth and the City of Calgary from which we draw our data. In the sections following, we describe the data and methodology we use. We then turn to defining and evaluating rates of housing success. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our measures for program scale and how success in housing programs impacts the rest of the social safety net.

2. THE SETTING

Our examination draws on data describing the experiences of youth participating in housing programs provided in Calgary, Alberta, Canada over the period 2012 to 2019. Calgary is a city with a population of over 1.3 million people. In four point-in-time counts conducted over the period 2014–18, an average of 3,305 people were found to be experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. Of these, an average of 282 were identified as youth aged 18-24 years (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2018).

The homeless-serving sector is co-ordinated by the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF), an independent charity funded by philanthropy and grants from Canada's federal government and Alberta's provincial government. The CHF plays a key role in funding and co-ordinating the responses of social agencies and shelter providers to changes in the needs of the population experiencing homelessness. To better understand the needs and challenges of the homeless-serving sector, the CHF collects and maintains large datasets describing the daily movements into and out of shelters and people's experiences in housing programs. For this study, we focus on the data describing the experience of 644 single, independent youth who were aged 15 to 24 years on the date of first entry into a housing program. These data, described in the next section, were provided to us anonymized under a research data sharing agreement.

Calgary's youth housing programs are designed to meet the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness.[3] Relative to adult programs, there is a larger focus on providing skills relevant to daily living and maintaining school supports. Program design is also sensitive to the impacts of earlier involvements with children's services and the complications arising from childhood abuse and neglect.

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2   See Ly and Latimer (2015) for a review of studies of these cost offsets and a summary of the cost savings they identify.
3   See Calgary Homeless Foundation (2017).

Table 1 shows the initial placement of youth in various categories of Calgary's housing programs. The first three rows report that 443 youths (69 per cent) were allocated to one of 11 youth-specific programs. The remaining 201 youths (31 per cent) were assigned to one of 20 single-adult-specific programs. The decision to place some youths in single-adult programs is due to the close alignment of their needs with those of single adults. The likelihood of a youth being placed in a single-adult program increases with age. Just short of 70 per cent of youth aged 20 years or less were placed in a youth program.

Table 1. Placement of Youth Clients in Housing Programs

	Number	%
Programs by sector		
Youth-specific (11 programs)	443	69%
Single-adult-specific (20 programs)	201	31%
Programs by spatial distribution of housing:		
Place-based (11 programs)	164	25%
Scattered site (19 programs)	480	75%
Programs by time expectation:		
Permanent supportive housing (PSH) (14 programs)	113	18%
Supportive housing (SH) (16 programs)	531	82%

The housing programs into which youth are allocated vary by expected time in program. As the name implies, youth placed in permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs are expected to stay for an extended period, possibly until requiring long-term care as senior citizens. Youth placed in supportive housing programs are expected to complete the program of support within one to two years.

Four agencies provide the 11 youth-specific programs: McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association, Wood's Homes, Boys and Girls Clubs Calgary (now known as Trellis Society) and Calgary John Howard Society. Of these, three are place-based while eight are scattered-site. The scattered-site model involves the separation of housing operation and social work support providers, typically with a private landlord handling the housing aspect. Conversely, place-based units involve the same entity managing both housing and social work support.[4]

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[4] Anderson-Baron and Collins (2019) note that the dependence on scattered-site programs has created challenges for housing programs in Calgary due to high rents and low vacancy rates. This has required administrators to devote considerable resources to improve and maintain positive relationships with landlords supportive of housing programs. Their results serve as a reminder that local housing and labour market conditions can play important roles in the success of housing programs.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The CHF collects and maintains two datasets used in our study. One, which we will refer to as shelter data, contains data describing how individuals use the city's shelter system. The other, which we will refer to as housing data, contains data describing the characteristics and experiences of individuals chosen to participate in housing programs. Individuals are identified by unique IDs, enabling CHF staff to link these two administrative datasets. This information was provided to us as anonymized data.

The housing data include information on single, independent youth chosen to participate in housing programs. The CHF collects the information using a standardized form at move-in. The move-in assessment contains information on age, gender, ethnicity, employment, education level, mental and physical health status, history of family violence and past interaction with the legal and health systems. The client self-reports all variables in the housing data, but they are recorded by a case manager who typically has some familiarity with the participant, so there is some vetting of responses. These assessments are used to determine who is chosen for placement in a housing program. An exit assessment provides information on the reason for exiting the program and destination upon exit. These data span the period from April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2019.

To provide sufficient time to evaluate a client's success in a program, the housing data were truncated on the right to limit our observations to participants who have stayed in a housing program for at least one year. Thus, all new move-ins are excluded after and including April 1, 2018. After this adjustment, the housing dataset contains information on 644 youth participants in housing programs.

The shelter data provide information on youth using the shelter system. The shelter system includes all single-adult and family shelters, detox programs and outreach programs. These data are linked to the housing data described earlier to observe movements in and out of the shelter system of youth participating in housing programs. These data are daily, spanning the period 2005–2019, and contain information on the shelter use of 8,792 unique individuals aged 18 to 24 years on first entry into the shelter system. These data will be used to describe the history of shelter use by youth chosen for housing programs.

4. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HOUSING PROGRAM CLIENTS

4-1. WHO HAS BEEN HOUSED IN CALGARY'S YOUTH HOUSING PROGRAMS?

Table 2 uses data from the housing dataset to summarize the demographic characteristics and patterns of emergency shelter use of 644 single youths placed in Calgary's housing programs over the period 2012–2018.[5] Where possible, we will comment on how representative youth chosen for housing programs are to the broader population of all youth experiencing homelessness in Calgary.

Table 2. Demographic Composition and Shelter History of Housing Clients at Move-in (N=644)

	Number	%
Gender		
Male	337	52%
Female	307	48%
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	362	56%
Indigenous	187	29%
Other	95	15%
Age Groups		
15 - 17 years	163	25%
18 - 20 years	242	38%
21 - 22 years	109	17%
23 - 24 years	130	20%
Clients by History of Shelter Use		
No shelter history	509	79%
Shelter users	135	21%
Transitional	92	14%
Episodic/Chronic	43	7%

Just over half of youth chosen for housing programs self-identified as male and just over half self-identified as Caucasian. Information on the ethnicity of youth experiencing homelessness in Calgary is not reported in public releases of point-in-time count results. The CHF provided us with a special tabulation indicating that in 2021, approximately 15 per cent of youth experiencing homelessness self-identified as Indigenous.[6] Thus, youth who self-identify as Indigenous were over-represented in housing programs.

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[5] We limited our attention to data prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic so our results would not be influenced by the distancing and other restrictions imposed by the homeless-serving sector of care during that time. First evidence of COVID-19 in Calgary occurred late in 2019.

[6] Indigenous is a broad category in which people self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. This calculation is based on an administrative count of people staying in shelters, transitional housing and public places such as hospitals, treatment and correction facilities. It is not as comprehensive as a point-in-time count (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2022).

Four-fifths of youth chosen for housing programs had no history of shelter use. Over the past four point-in-time counts in Calgary (2014–18), homelessness meant a stay in an emergency shelter for approximately 25 per cent of youth, nearly the same percentage of youth with a history of shelter use as chosen for participation in housing programs (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2014, 2016, 2018).

Of the 135 youths placed in housing programs who had a history of shelter use, 92 can be classified as having been transitional users of shelter: those whose use of shelters were infrequent and short.[7] The remaining 43 youths placed in housing programs following a history of shelter use can be classified as having been episodic or chronic shelter users: those whose use was more frequent and involved longer stays.

4-2. YOUTH CHOSEN FOR HOUSING PROGRAMS BY ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH CHARACTERISTICS

Prior to entry into housing programs, clients were asked: "Do you have an ongoing mental health condition?" and "Have you recently (past 12 months) been released from a mental health facility?" With respect to addiction, clients were asked: "Do you have an addictions/substance abuse issue?" and "Have you recently (past 12 months) been released from a residential addiction facility?"

Table 3. Self-Reported Mental Health and Addiction Status Prior to Program Entry[8]

		Mental health		
		No	Yes	Total
Addiction	**No**	19%	22%	41%
	Yes	14%	45%	59%
	Total	33%	67%	100%

Calculations presented in Table 3 summarize the answers for these questions in a two-way contingency table. Only 19 per cent of youth chosen for housing programs self-reported neither a mental health problem nor a problem with addiction. The remaining 81 per cent reported either an addiction or an issue with their mental health. Nearly half (45 per cent) of youth chosen for housing programs reported issues with both mental health and addiction.

In Table 4, we show the self-reported addiction and mental health status of youth according to their primary residence prior to entry into a housing program. For those entering a housing program from a shelter, we report data by the client's history of shelter use. Youth entering housing programs from shelters were more likely to self-report substance abuse and/or mental health issues than those who did not. Of those youth entering housing programs from shelters, the frequency of self-reported substance abuse and/or mental health issues increased with the chronicity of shelter use.

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[7] See the Appendix where we report the results of *k-mean* cluster analysis of the emergency shelter use of 8,792 youths in Calgary over the period 2005–2019. Youth found in the housing data who are also found in the shelter data are identified as transitional, episodic or chronic users of shelters based on their pattern of shelter use.

[8] The housing dataset is missing the self-reported mental health and addiction histories for eight of the 644 youth.

Table 4. Association among Primary Residence of Housed Youth, Substance Abuse and Mental Health

	Substance abuse		Mental health		Both		Sample size
From non-shelters	276	55%	332	66%	210	42%	501
From shelters	99	73%	95	70%	76	56%	135
Transitional	60	65%	62	67%	46	50%	92
Episodic/Chronic	39	92%	33	74%	30	69%	43

Note: "Both" in the third column identifies youth with both addiction and mental health histories. Missing data resulted in the loss of eight observations on the self-reported substance abuse and mental health of youth without a history of shelter use.

4-3. YOUTH CHOSEN FOR HOUSING PROGRAMS BY HEALTH AND JUSTICE SYSTEM INTERACTIONS

More of the characteristics of youth chosen to participate in Calgary's housing programs can be defined by looking at their level of interaction with the health and justice systems prior to move-in. At the time of entry into a housing program, youth were asked to self-report the number of hospital visits, the number of emergency room visits and the number of interactions with authorities they identified as being police over the previous 12 months. The questions asked were: "How many times have you been hospitalized in the past 12 months?", "How many times have you been to a hospital emergency room in the past 12 months?" and "How many times have you had interactions with the police in the past 12 months?"

Table 5. Health and Justice System Interactions of HF Clients Prior to Program Entry

	Minimum	1st Quartile	Median	Mean	3rd Quartile	Maximum
Hospital visits	0	0	0	1.23	1	60
Emergency department visits	0	0	0	1.70	1	60
Police interactions	0	0	1	2.88	3	104

Note: Answers regarding hospital and emergency department visits are missing for 28 and 26 (of 644) housing clients, respectively. Answers regarding police interactions are missing for 29 youths.

Table 5 shows that hospital visits, emergency department visits and police interactions are all dominated by the experiences of relatively few youths with large numbers of interactions. It is noteworthy that self-reported police interactions may include interactions with authority figures youth erroneously identify as police. For example, they may include interactions with police officers, transit police, bylaw enforcement officers and "mall cops." This is important as the cost savings to the justice system that may potentially result from success in housing youth come mainly from reducing interactions with police officers (Jadidzadeh et al. 2023).

5. SUCCESS, FAILURE AND IN PROGRESS

5-1. VARIETIES OF SUCCESS

To determine the exit outcomes of housing participants, we use the responses to the exit interview questions of "Why is the client leaving the program?" and "What is the client's destination?" The responses to these questions allow us to identify four outcomes.

Following the approach of Wong et al. (2006) and Gaetz and Gulliver (2013), a youth is identified as having *graduated to housing* if, after spending at least 12 months in a housing program, they left for permanent housing without case management.

If a youth remains in a housing program, the youth is housed but continues to receive case management. If a youth has remained in a housing program for at least one year without exiting, they are identified as being *in progress*. There is still uncertainty with respect to whether these youth will eventually graduate to a more permanent form of housing or return to homelessness.

We identify youth as having *returned to homelessness* should they reappear in the shelter data; should they re-enter a housing program 30 days or more after a previous exit; if they were found by case managers to have been non-compliant with the housing program; or were removed from the program due to criminal activity or violence.[9]

Finally, youth may exit from a housing program in a way we are unable to identify. Their outcome is labelled as *Unknown*. These include youth who were referred to other non-housing programs or moved out of the service area, possibly to reunite with family in housing. It also includes youth who died while enrolled in a housing program.

5-2. OUTCOMES BY YEAR OF ENTRY

Youth entered housing programs over the entire 2012–18 period. Our data allow us to observe early entrants for many years. Later entrants could not be observed for as long. Those who entered a housing program in 2017, for example, could be observed only until the end of 2018 and so observed for between one and two years depending on when in 2017 they entered the program. On the other hand, we were able to observe those who entered a housing program in 2012 for six to seven years (to the end of 2018). Figure 1 reports outcome rates by year of entry into a housing program, the number of youths admitted in that year and the number of years observed before assessing housing outcomes.

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9   After a first exit from a housing program, a youth is identified as having returned to homelessness when the youth stays five days or more in an emergency shelter; is identified as having been added to the Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA) triage list to be considered for re-housing; uses detox programs three times or more; uses outreach programs five times or more; or, finally, shows up five times or more at the Safe Communities Opportunity and Resource Centre (SORCe).

Figure 1. Outcomes by Year of Entry into Housing Program
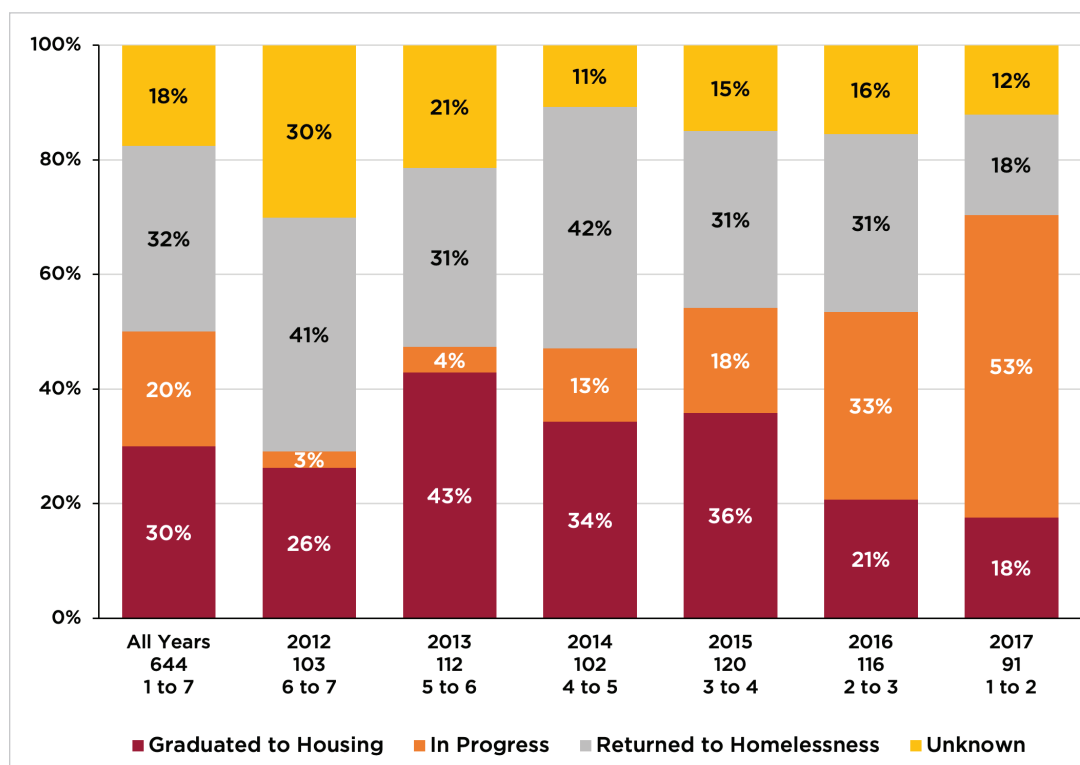
Note: The three rows of the horizontal axis report the year of admission, the number of youths admitted in that year and the number of years observed before assessing housing outcomes.

The results reported in Figure 1 show that as time spent observing youth increases, the percentage of youth whom we identify as being in progress steadily falls while the percentages who graduate to housing and return to homelessness generally grow with each passing year. Thus, as time passes, youth still in housing programs gradually sort into long-term success (housing without case management) or a return to homelessness. These results indicate that when evaluating a housing program's success, it is important to recognize this time dimension. The number of youths for whom we are unable to identify an outcome (Unknown) tends to grow, with the most common reason being youth disappearing from the housing dataset without having answered "Why is the client leaving the program?" and "What is the client's destination?"

5-3. SUCCESS RATES

We define rates of success by identifying the number of youth able to maintain housing relative to the number for whom we can identify clear outcomes. Thus, we omit from our measured rates of success those youth we identify as having an unknown outcome.[10] Using results calculated over the entire period of 2012–17, we are defining rates of success for 531 housing clients. At the end of the 2012–2017 period, 322 of 531 clients (61 per cent) remained housed either in housing programs or in permanent housing without supports. Over this same period, 209 of the 531 youth for whom we observe clear outcomes (39 per cent) had returned to homelessness.

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[10] This is consistent with how the results of the At Home/Chez Soi demonstration project have been evaluated. See, for example, Aubry et al. (2015), who, in a 12-month follow-up to the demonstration project, define the rate of success of program participants at maintaining housing as the number of participants still in housing relative to the number of program participants whose housing outcomes they could continue to observe.

These measures of success (remained housed in housing programs or in permanent housing) and failure (returned to homelessness) can also be reported by year of entry into housing programs and the length of time youths have been observed. This is reported in Table 6.

Table 6. Housing Success Rates over Time

Year Admitted	Evaluation Period (Years)	Success Rate (%)
2017	1 to 2	80
2016	2 to 3	63
2015	3 to 4	64
2014	4 to 5	53
2013	5 to 6	60
2012	6 to 7	42

The rate of success was very high at 80 per cent in the short term (assessed after up to two years) and plateaued at approximately 60 per cent when evaluated over a period up to six years, before falling to 42 per cent when evaluated over six to seven years.

6. COMPARISON TO OTHER STUDIES

We know of no study like ours that examines the experiences of youths placed into a community-based, non-experimental housing program over a very long period. We believe that it is impressive for such a program to realize an 80-per-cent success rate when evaluated over one to two years, and 60 per cent when evaluated for up to six years. We believe it is particularly impressive for such a program to claim that after five to six years, 43 per cent of formerly homeless youths would eventually be able to establish permanent housing where they would no longer require ongoing case management.

A direct comparison of our success rate with that reported from controlled experiments such as the At Home/Chez Soi study is necessarily imperfect given the differences in study design. Still, we interpret the results we report as broadly like those reported by Kozloff et al. (2016). In that study, youths in the At Home/Chez Soi study who received the Housing First "treatment" remained stably housed for 65 per cent of the 645 days for which data describing their experiences were available, while those who received "treatment as usual" did so for only 31 per cent of the 582 days for which data on their experiences were available. The broad similarity of success rates, despite differences in the characteristics of youth enrolled in the two cases and differences in study design, suggests that a housing program's most important feature may simply be the general approach of offering housing without preconditions.

7. DISCUSSION

The rate of success in a housing program, and the cost of that program, are both sensitive to the personal and experiential characteristics of youth chosen for the program. This is true for two reasons. One is that those characteristics may influence the rate of success of youth chosen for the program. Higher acuity youth who self-report mental health and/or addiction issues may, for example, prove to be less successful in housing programs than youth who self-report neither issue. If so, their choice for inclusion in the program increases costs and lowers rates of program success. The other consideration, however, is that the success of higher acuity youth in the program yields higher cost offsets realized by the health sector. Similarly, choosing youth whose history of shelter use was chronic and youth whose history of police interactions was frequent prior to entering the housing program may, on the one hand, lower program success rates but may, on the other hand, increase the size of cost offsets realized by the shelter and justice systems when they are successful.

These trade-offs raise interesting issues. If, for example, minimizing the cost to the system planner of hitting targets for reducing youth homelessness is its only consideration for choosing youth for the program, then youth with low acuity as measured by self-reported substance abuse and mental health issues would presumably be more attractive choices. From the perspective of a government funder, on the other hand, choosing higher acuity youth may be preferable as their success in the program may maximize cost offsets realized by the rest of the social safety net. These competing incentives can create a potential conflict between the goals of maximizing program success rates (and so minimizing housing program costs) and maximizing cost offsets to the justice and health-care systems.

We have no direct evidence to suggest these considerations mattered for the decisions the system operator made of whom to choose for Calgary's housing programs. The indirect evidence suggests they did not. We can observe, for example, that a high percentage of youth chosen for the program self-reported high rates of substance abuse and mental health issues (Table 4). This suggests that the housing program certainly did not shy away from enrolling youth who would possibly be less likely to succeed.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper has provided evidence suggesting that programs in Calgary, implemented over the period from 2012 to 2018 and intended to assist youth in maintaining or re-establishing housing, realized high rates of success. The evidence we have provided suggests this impressive rate of success was generated by a program populated by a high percentage of high-acuity youth. If one presumes high acuity is correlated with a lower rate of success in housing programs, the record in Calgary is all the more impressive.

Ours is a case study of a housing program evaluated over a specific period in a specific city with a specific set of clients. We cannot offer commentary on the effectiveness of youth programs in other jurisdictions applied over different periods of time and populated by youth with different personal or experiential characteristics from those enrolled in Calgary's program. We can, however, comment that the evidence from Calgary is that even though a housing program may deviate some distance from the PHF model, it can nonetheless realize an impressive rate of success even when evaluated over a long period. It suggests that what may be the most important characteristic of a housing program intended to assist homeless youth is a general approach of offering housing without preconditions.

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APPENDIX: CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF HOMELESS SHELTER USE

Using the shelter dataset, we employ *k-mean* clustering analysis to identify three unique clusters, each with standardized values for total days stayed and episodes in single-adult shelters. The unit of observation is daily. A typical observation might identify person X as entering the shelter system on January 21, exiting on March 25, re-entering on August 13, etc. The methodology involves examining the information provided on entries and exits by every individual using the shelter system over an entire, appropriately defined sample period. Based on these histories, individual shelter users are classified as transitional, episodic or chronic. The separation of individuals into these groups is determined endogenously. That is, the method clusters individuals into groups so that the shelter use of youths allocated to each of the groups is clearly different in length of stay and frequency of use.

We follow the practice in the literature (Kuhn and Culhane 1998) of defining a shelter episode as a period in a shelter that is separated from another period in a shelter by at least 30 days. To fairly assess an individual's shelter use, we right censor the data to ensure we observe them for at least 12 months following first entry. Thus, we omit from the sample clients whose first entry into the shelter system falls within a year of the end of our sample period, December 30, 2019. Our cluster analysis involves analyzing the shelter use of 8,792 uniquely identified youths aged 18 to 24 years on first entry into the shelter system.

We identify three clusters defining shelter users according to the frequency and length of stays in shelter. Following the terminology common in this literature, shelter users are identified as transitional, episodic and chronic. This approach has been widely used to identify the frequency and length of shelter stays by single adults. Prominent examples include Kuhn and Culhane (1998), Aubry et al. (2013) and Rabinovitch, Pauly and Zhao (2016). Culhane et al. (2007) use the approach to examine shelter use by families while Jadidzadeh and Kneebone (2018, 2021) have previously used this approach to identify youth's use of homeless shelters.

Table A1. Patterns of Shelter Stays of Youth in Single-Adult Shelter in Calgary (2005–2019)

Clusters	Transitional	Episodic	Chronic
Sample size	7,849	829	114
Percentage of clients	89.3	9.4	1.3
Average number of episodes	1.82 (1.32)	10.86 (4.92)	10.16 (6.16)
Average number of days	23.94 (46.68)	193.35 (142.62)	961.33 (421.33)
Average number of days per episode	13.09 (28.43)	22.32 (26.11)	164.90 (233.14)
No. of occupied shelter beds	187,930	160,290	109,592
Percentage of occupied shelter beds	41.0	35.0	23.9

Note: Numbers in the parentheses are standard deviations.

Table A1 identifies the number of unique emergency shelters' clients whose shelter stays can be classified as transitional, episodic and chronic.[1] Transitional shelter users are those, on average, experiencing short stays (45.42 days) and a small number of episodes (1.90) in shelter use over an 11-year period. Episodic users are those experiencing relatively short stays (309.35 days) but a large number of episodes (11.58 episodes). Chronic shelter users are those with long stays (1,900.61 days) and a relatively small number of episodes (5.32). This pattern of results, in which the majority are transitional users of shelters and only a small minority are chronic users, is a common finding in this literature.

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[1]   All t-tests comparing the three clusters highly supported the conclusion that the characteristics of transitional, episodic and chronic shelter users reported in Table A1 are significantly different. Results of these hypothesis tests are available on request.

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Ali Jadidzadeh is a researcher with a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Calgary, where his focus was on applied econometrics. He a Research Fellow at the School of Public Policy, University of Calgary. As a contributor to the research of the social policy team at the School of Public Policy, his research primarily centers around homelessness-related issues. He applies his empirical skill sets to work with large datasets to investigate the effective design of Housing First and emergency shelter programs aimed at benefiting and supporting those without permanent housing. His other research interests encompass issues related to energy economics.

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