



McCreary Centre Society

EVALUATION REPORT – SEPTEMBER, 2010

Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC):
Youth Supported Housing Program

Evaluation by the McCreary Centre Society
www.mcs.bc.ca

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC) Supported Housing Program works with market and non-profit housing providers to provide supported housing for at-risk and homeless youth. The goal is to secure housing units for 20 young people and to provide them with the skills necessary to successfully transition from supported to independent housing.

The evaluation consisted of interviews and focus groups with six BYRC staff, three non-BYRC transition workers, four landlords, and 10 youth currently in the program. Nine of the 10 youth also completed a paper-and-pencil survey that tapped their previous housing experiences and feedback about the program. The objective of the evaluation was to canvass a range of perspectives to gain an understanding of how the program works for all those involved.

Findings indicated that BYRC's housing program is targeting the intended population of high-risk youth, specifically those who have experienced challenges finding and maintaining housing. Most of the young people who completed the survey have lived in government care, 'couch surfed', and/or lived in a safe house or shelter at some point in their lives.

Further, the results showed that there is a high need for this BYRC housing program. Although many landlords understood that youth face challenges when it comes to finding housing, many admitted that they would not rent to youth who were not part of this program. The evaluation highlighted that the role of the BYRC case manager, who acts as mediator between youth and landlords, is integral to the smooth-running of the program, and to the landlords' involvement.

All those involved in the evaluation were very satisfied with the BYRC housing program overall. They also provided suggestions for how the program could build on its strengths and become even stronger in the future.

BYRC management and staff read a draft of the evaluation report and added comments, which have been included in this final report.

BYRC staffs' feedback

- BYRC staff recognized that the present supported housing program is not currently designed for young people with significant addictions issues, and identified this as an area for development in the future. They explained that they would like to offer a continuum of housing options for youth with a range of needs, hopefully leading to fewer young people experiencing homelessness.

BYRC's Comment: In November 2009 BYRC, in partnership with others, developed the Urban Youth Project. In this 30-month pilot, BYRC provides housing support to 20 formerly homeless young adults with significant mental health and addictions issues.

- The staff would like to develop the program into a social enterprise, where youth who are housed are also employed by the program. If funded, youth could be hired to help other participants move in or out of BYRC housing, or to perform maintenance on the suites.
- The most stressful part of BYRC staffs' job is often the rush to move a youth out of a suite and to move another youth in. Having more funding to pay for the rent while maintenance is carried out would alleviate the time constraints on preparing the suite for the next tenant.

- Additional funding would also provide more flexibility for the program to subsidize youth who could not pay their rent when they were between jobs. A larger operating budget would also allow BYRC to offer more assistance to youth with transportation issues and could increase staffing for the project.

Non-BYRC transition workers' feedback

Overall, the non-BYRC transition workers were satisfied with the program and appreciated how BYRC has provided a service to both them and their clients. Transition workers saw room for improvement in the following areas:

- They suggested that BYRC staff could pre-emptively deal with maintenance concerns before these issues become problematic for the tenants. For example, one suite was reported to be prone to flooding and it was suggested that action be taken to prevent this from occurring again.

BYRC's Comment: All maintenance related issues known to the staff are subsequently shared with the landlord for the landlord to deal with.

- The non-BYRC workers wanted to see a greater number of suites become available to youth through the program, as there is great demand in Vancouver's competitive housing environment.
- They felt that youth would benefit from additional support to fully understand what their rights as tenants are.

BYRC's Comment: All youth in the supported housing program are required to attend BYRC's Housing 101 workshop which includes information on landlord and tenants rights. All participants also receive BYRC's Handbook FREE (Finding Rentals Everywhere Easily), which has a section on rights and responsibilities.

Youth participants' feedback

Even youth who had suggestions for improving the program were keen to point out that living in BYRC housing is their best option and is superior to where they had lived before, be that with other housing programs, in government care, or an SRO (single room occupancy). They also reported that they thought highly of the housing workers at BYRC.

All the youth who took part in the evaluation reported being satisfied with the program so far. They appreciated the support they received and the structures that were in place within the program, coupled with a respect for their autonomy. They reported that their skills had improved in a number of areas as a direct result of their involvement in the program, including housekeeping, self-care, communication skills, stress management, their mood and hope for the future. They also reported reductions in high-risk behaviours, such as substance abuse.

However, youth reported minimal improvements in their development of job skills and employment planning, as well as money management. Although not a core function of the program, if BYRC staff could help the youth in these domains in the future it is likely that the

youth participants would feel even more equipped to live independently once they leave the program.

BYRC's Comment: These components are not within the program's core function and youth interested in job training, employment planning and money management are referred to employment workers at BYRC and elsewhere and referred to the non-compulsory "Financial Literacy Workshop".

The young people had a number of suggestions to develop and expand the program:

- Several ideas were given that would make Bantleman Court more of a community, such as a community room or organized group activities. They also suggested that an experiential adult could live in that complex who could act as a mentor.

BYRC's Comment: We agree with this and when BYRC takes over day to day operations of Bantleman in August 2010, these types of activities will be explored and implemented.

- Youth recommended more suites for young mothers. Their impression was that youth with children spend a longer time on the waitlist waiting for suitable housing. It was also suggested that more single parents could be housed together where they could support each other, such as in a complex that has a safe area for children to play.

BYRC's Comment: Though this is a housing service offered by others (i.e. Watari) we agree this is an element BYRC would like to include within its housing continuum.

- Youth participants were aware of BYRC budget constraints and felt that increased funding for the program would allow staff to offer greater assistance to youth in areas such as transportation. More funding to meet the needs of young parents, as well as a start-up kit geared specifically for them, was also recommended.

BYRC's Comment: We agree and will work with some of the young mothers/parents to incorporate their suggestions into a parent specific start up kit.

- Some of the youth would prefer longer drop-in hours or to receive more support looking for apartments outside of the housing program.

BYRC's Comment: We agree but the level of funding limits our capacity.

Landlords' feedback

All the landlords interviewed stated that they were planning to continue renting suites to BYRC, and were very satisfied with the role of the case manager in the program which provides a mediator between landlords and the youth participants. All the landlords would recommend the program to other landlords, based on the stable rent cheque and BYRC's role with the youth which reduces landlords' need to advertise suites and directly interact with the youth. There were few critiques from the landlords, with most reporting that the program was working well for them.

Finally, landlords commented that the program appeared to be successfully helping young people "to get their lives back on track" and that without BYRC's assistance, few of the youth would have been able to secure and maintain housing on their own.

BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In 2007, Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC) initiated a supported housing project and obtained market and non-profit housing units for homeless youth or those at-risk of homelessness. The rationale was to provide youth with not only housing but also support for developing the necessary skills to avoid or break the cycle of homelessness.

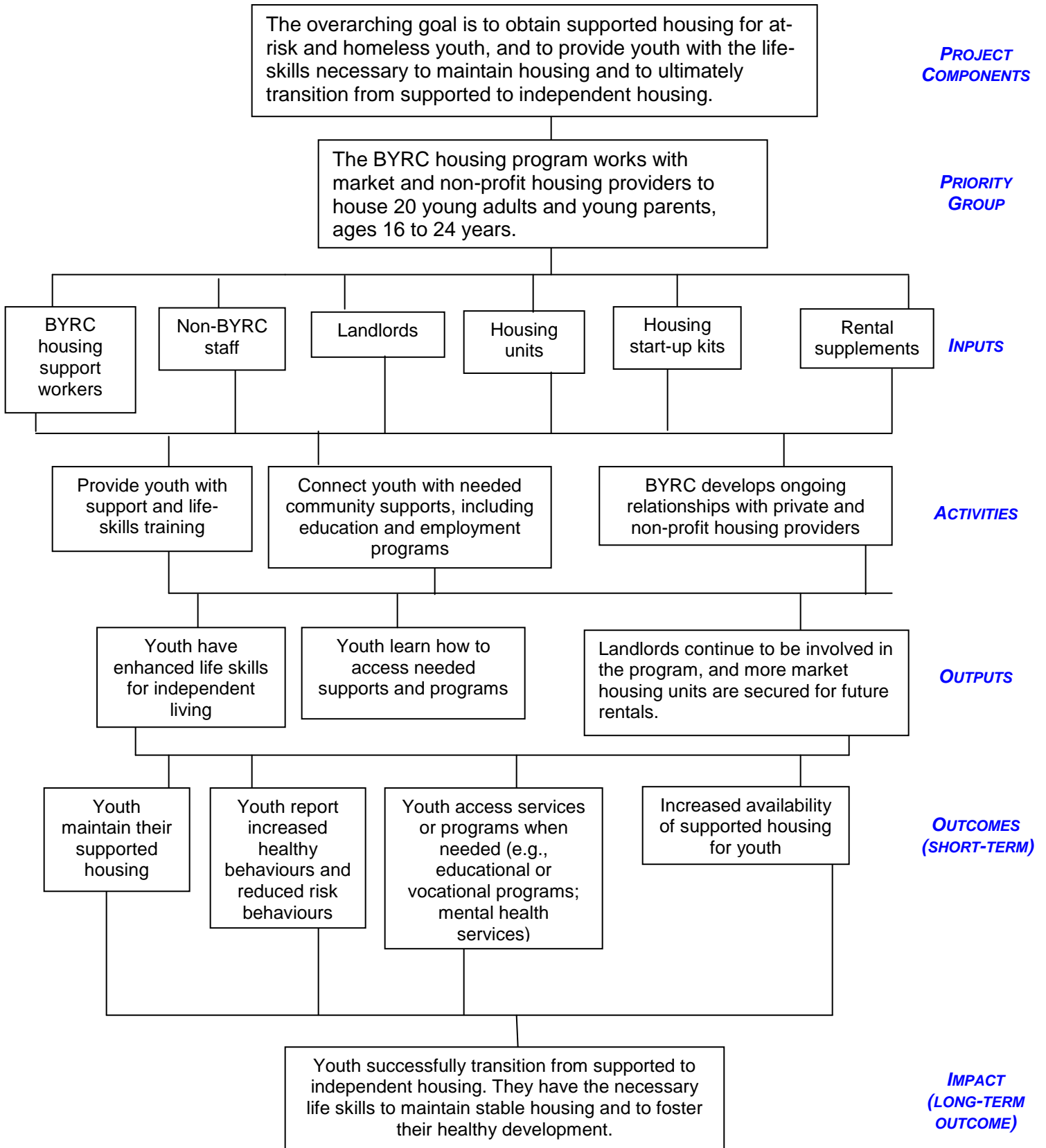
With funding from the Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative, BYRC has since expanded its services and made the supported housing program available to referrals from Vancouver's three other designated youth hubs: Directions Youth Services Centre, South Vancouver Youth Centre (Connexus) and Urban Native Youth Association. The goal of this program is to secure housing units for 20 young people aged 16-24 and to provide them with the life-skills, financial literacy and food security skills necessary to transition from supported to independent housing.

BYRC enters into agreements with housing providers wherein BYRC guarantees rent and to repair any damage to the unit beyond normal wear and tear. A BYRC case manager acts as an intermediary between landlords and the program participants. Each youth has an assigned Transition to Adulthood Worker who has a key role as part of the youth's service team and provides a range of supports including emergency assistance.

BYRC assists to locate, or provides youth with, limited rental supplements and housing start-up kits. BYRC also provides workshops and one-to-one support to discuss life skills issues that may arise, such as budgeting, paying bills, opening a bank account, purchasing food on a budget, conflict resolution, dealing with fellow residents and neighbours, nutrition and cooking skills. The program also aims to connect youth with education and employment programs at BYRC, Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS), and partner agencies.

A comprehensive framework to evaluate this project was developed by BYRC and the other youth hubs. The McCreary Centre Society was then asked to carry out the independent evaluation, and implemented the existing framework with minor modifications

BYRC Logic Model



METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was designed to incorporate opinions and perspectives from all major stakeholders in the BYRC Supported Housing Program, including BYRC staff, non-BYRC transition workers, participating landlords, and the youth who are currently housed by BYRC. This approach made it possible to identify a number of different perspectives, and better understand how the program works for all parties involved.

The methodology consisted of focus groups, individual interviews and youth self-report surveys, and all were completed between April and July, 2010. The focus groups and individual interviews provided qualitative data, and the surveys provided quantitative data from forced-choice items as well as qualitative data from answers to open-ended questions. The survey included some of the same questions that were asked in the youth focus group and interviews, to maximize the likelihood of youth responding in a way that most suited them (i.e., in writing or verbally). The survey also included more personal questions pertaining to youths' experiences with housing and their feedback on whether the BYRC program has helped to improve their skills in specific domains.

Ten youth (7 females and 3 males) currently involved in the BYRC housing program took part in the focus group or interviews, with nine completing the survey as well. Five of these youth lived in the Annex group housing, two lived in Bantleman Court, and the remaining three resided in one-bedroom units in an apartment building. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25, and the average age was 21 years. Youth who completed the survey most commonly identified their ethnic or cultural background as Aboriginal (89%). The second most common ethnicity was European (33%; youth could choose more than one background).

Youth were interviewed by McCreary staff, either in a group or individually. The initial plan was to conduct focus groups for all the youth, but after the first group was completed it was difficult to schedule other sessions that multiple youth could attend. The youth focus groups were therefore modified into individual interviews. One advantage to this strategy was that the interviews could be scheduled at a location that was most convenient to the youth, which was particularly helpful for young mothers. Also, some youth who would likely not have shared their opinions in a larger group felt comfortable talking to the research staff on their own. Finally, because each youth participant came from a unique background, it was easier for the research staff to discuss topics that were relevant to the individual youth.

Prior to taking part in the interview, youth were asked to complete a brief survey asking about their previous housing experiences, the support they receive, and feedback on their time spent in the BYRC housing program. The survey took most youth 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

A focus group was also held for BYRC staff members, including the case manager, three housing support workers and two BYRC transition workers. A separate focus group was attended by three professionals outside of BYRC who work with the youth. Both focus groups were held at the BYRC office.

Four landlords who rent to BYRC were interviewed individually over the phone. The landlords participating in the housing program had been involved in the program from six months to over two years. They rented a range of housing to BYRC from one-bedroom suites to a family house.

All of the suites are one-bedroom units, with the exception of the shared house. Six youth live in the shared house, which also has a caretaker who was interviewed as well. The caretaker lives

in the house and acts as a building caretaker for the youth participants. The remaining participants live in scattered one-bedroom suites, with a few living in Bantleman Court (a private rented housing complex), the newest addition to the housing program.

Participants' anonymity was maintained in this report. Therefore, some comments that would be identifiable were not included.

FINDINGS

BYRC data shows that approximately 90% of youth that are referred to the BYRC supported housing program are housed through the program. A total of 55 youth have been housed through the program since it started, with 21 housed at the time of the evaluation. Of the 34 youth no longer living in a BYRC rented housing unit, 16 transitioned into independent housing (47%), seven were evicted by their landlord (although three were subsequently re-housed by BYRC), and eight were asked by BYRC to leave the program. Length of stay in the program varied. However, 22 youth (40%) had remained housed within the program for over 12 months.

BYRC rents 15 suites from four landlords in East Vancouver. One landlord had left the program after a tenant caused extensive damage to his suite, and approximately 35 landlords had declined to participate, either because they wanted more income from their suite than BYRC or the youth could provide or because the landlords decided not to rent to young people. At the time of the evaluation, the housing support workers had full caseloads, so no new suites were being pursued.

The following findings reflect the perspectives of BYRC staff, non-BYRC Transition to Adulthood Workers, young people currently involved in the BYRC housing program, and the landlords (housing providers).

Context and Scope

BYRC housing program compared to other programs

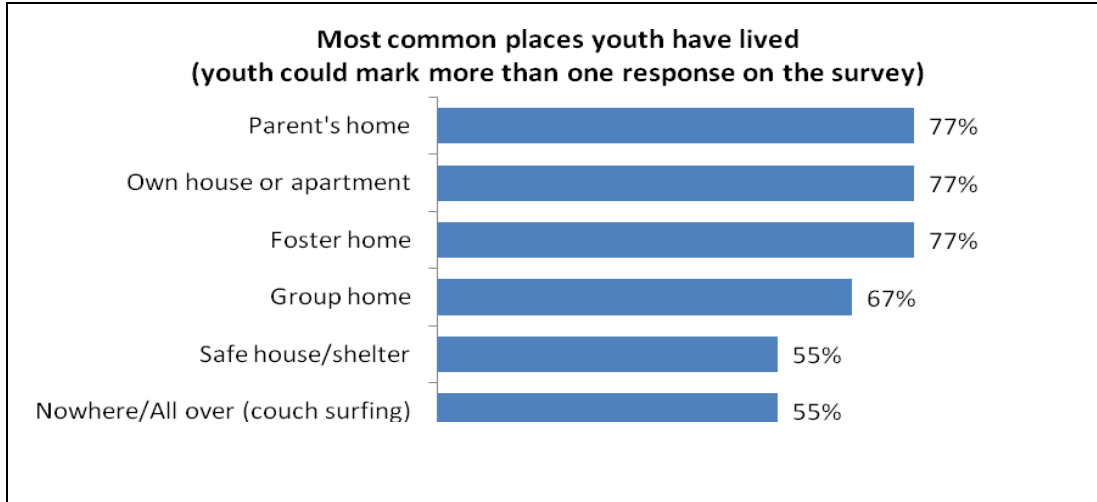
“This program has more support, people to talk to. Other programs just paid my rent, but this one gives me someone to talk to.” - Youth participant

According to BYRC staff, non-BYRC transition workers and youth participants, the BYRC housing program is unique from other places where the youth may have lived previously including foster homes, group homes or semi-independent living in that the youth are more independent. All agreed that participants appreciate the combination of independent living and availability of support if required.

BYRC staff explained that the shared house can feel like a group home when youth first move in due to the rules and contracts, but this feeling tends to fade. Non-BYRC staff saw the shared house as an ideal transition from a group home, and reported that often the structure of the house is more relaxed than youth first anticipate. The shared house is geared to youth who prefer to live with other people, and referrals to this residence are done based on this preference.

Youth identified a number of distinctions between BYRC’s housing program and other similar initiatives. Several participants reported that the support provided by BYRC staff has exceeded what they experienced in other programs where youth only received help with housing. One youth preferred that the housing is away from downtown Vancouver. A resident in the shared house appreciated how the roommates all help each other out. Other participants discussed their appreciation for how the program is more youth run than other programs they have experienced and that they are living independently without constant supervision.

Youth acknowledged that living in BYRC housing is their best option and is superior to where they had lived before, be that with other housing programs, in government care, or an SRO (single room occupancy).



Getting involved and staying involved in the program

“Luckily, there is BYRC there to assist these people, because if BYRC wasn’t there, I assure you that they wouldn’t get a place.” – Landlord

Non BYRC transition workers who referred youth to BYRC saw the housing program as an easy way for young people to find housing in a city that has many challenges with affordable accommodation. However, in their experience few youth have initially wanted to be referred to the program. The workers reported that most of their clients, particularly the female youth, get discouraged when they learn that there is a housing worker involved, thinking that this will restrict their independence. However, once they meet the BYRC housing support worker they tend to change their mind. BYRC staff are well-liked by most youth, seen as a good source of information and support, and have been responsive to the individual needs of each youth, which has contributed to the youth staying in the program.

According to the transition workers, youth have also been hesitant to join the program because of the rules they would have to follow—most notably that they cannot invite anyone else to live in the suite with them—and because it can often take months for a BYRC suite to become available. On the other hand, the transition workers listed several reasons their clients chose to get involved. Most importantly, the youth do not have to interact directly with landlords, because a BYRC case manager acts as mediator between youth and landlords.

Most youth participants spent approximately one year in the program, and 22 had stayed in the program for between 12 and 18 months. Among youth who completed the survey, the majority (56%) had lived at their current location between two to six months. All the youth participants had positive feedback regarding their experiences being housed with BYRC. Some emphasized the stability of the housing, and how this program is ideal for youth who are having trouble finding a place to live. One youth appreciated that the program found landlords who would rent

to youth, and that even though there are limited units available, there is a good chance youth will find housing through this program. Other participants discussed the resources and support that come with participating in the program, including workers' support in maintaining the suites, taking youth to job interviews, supplying a start-up kit, and providing life skills training.

When asked why they had chosen to get involved in the program and remain involved, the landlords appeared to have limited knowledge of the purpose of the program and who it is intended to serve. Landlords knew that BYRC is helping young people to find and maintain housing but they said they had little other knowledge about the program. BYRC staff stated that landlords often need reassurance that the youth in the program are not criminally involved before they agree to rent to BYRC.

BYRC staff reported that when landlords first signed up to take part in the housing program, they received printed information, including brochures about the program. In contrast, none of the landlords interviewed remembered receiving any printed materials when they first joined the program. In fact, one landlord laughed at the suggestion, instead reporting that he had just received a business card from the BYRC staff who contacted him about his apartment listing.

BYRC's Comment: We do have literature that we provide to landlords (and others) about the program. We obviously need to develop a landlord specific handout/brochure and ensure all landlords receive copies. We need to strengthen this component of the program and send each landlord correspondence and program material.

BYRC staff suggested that it may be beneficial for written materials to be printed in other languages to accommodate the needs of landlords who have English as a second language.

Whatever the language barriers, BYRC staff and landlords agreed that landlords benefit from meeting face-to-face with the case manager and learning about the program that way, or from getting information from other landlords who are already renting to BYRC. The landlords also reported that their conversations about the program with BYRC staff helped to build their trust in the program, and in some cases was why they got involved.

Challenges to finding housing

"I think no one wants to rent to young people because, first of all, they don't have jobs or even if they have a job they make trouble when they move in, like partying." – Landlord

BYRC staff explained that it had been a challenge to find appropriate affordable housing units for the program. The youth who participated in the program were on strict budgets, which limited their housing options. Unfortunately, many of the affordable suites were not well maintained and were unsafe to house young people in. Although there were some landlords that had approached BYRC about becoming involved in the housing program, the monthly rent for their suites was often more than the youth could afford, and therefore their units could not be accepted into the program.

The staff at BYRC also listed several challenges that young people typically face when looking for housing. These include being discriminated against based on age or race, or by landlords who preferred being paid in cash or who were uncomfortable with government cheques. According to BYRC and non-BYRC staff, some landlords have a bias against income assistance or have had previous negative experiences with youth, and the current housing market allows

landlords to be discriminating about who they choose to rent to. Furthermore, BYRC staff felt that young people rarely know their rights as tenants.

The non-BYRC transition workers identified a long list of other challenges facing young people who have tried to find housing in Vancouver. Cost and location have been the biggest factors. The only suites that youth could afford tended to be in the Downtown Eastside area. These apartments were often sub-standard, not safe or comfortable, and had broken appliances or were missing these commodities entirely.

Certain youth may have particular difficulties finding housing. BYRC and non-BYRC staff concurred that that youth who are pregnant or have children, Aboriginal youth, or those with mental health concerns often have a harder time finding a landlord who would rent to them. It was suggested that males are less successful at securing tenancies, but although females are more likely to secure a tenancy they are also more likely to be harassed or intimidated by landlords. Staff also explained that landlords renting illegal suites rarely rent to young people on government assistance as they are worried about being taxed on their income.

Youth identified a number of challenges that they had faced prior to starting with BYRC in terms of finding housing, which were similar to those identified by BYRC staff and non-BYRC transition workers. Participants described being discriminated against by landlords because of their age, due to not being in school, because they were pregnant or had children, or because they were on income assistance. The landlords tended to recognize the challenges that most young people face in finding housing on their own, noting that given the choice the majority of landlords would rent to older tenants. One landlord empathized with youth who cannot find landlords who will rent to them, while simultaneously endorsing stereotypes about youth, such as that they often are unemployed, party too much and make trouble for the landlord.

Despite understanding the challenges facing young people, some of the landlords were hesitant to consider renting to youth who were not part of the BYRC program. Landlords reported that they rented to the youth because of the support of the program and the consistency of the rent cheques, and that they would not rent to a young person without the support of BYRC staff. One landlord stated that although he would not accept youth unless they initially came through the BYRC program, he would consider continuing to rent to a young person after he or she had left the program.

*Youths' top challenges for finding housing in the past
(among those who completed the survey):*

- Shortage of safe & affordable housing
- Lack of support
- Being on Social Assistance

Past challenges maintaining housing

The transition workers reported that the main reason youth have had difficulty staying housed (outside the BYRC program) was that they had been evicted for having friends over who were noisy and disruptive. Based on their experience, some landlords were reasonable about giving

multiple warnings before evicting a youth, while others were not. The transition workers stressed that in general landlords were fearful of renting to youth because they were worried about substance use in their apartments, yet noted that youth they work with had rarely been evicted for this.

The transition workers explained that other than evictions, some young people had left their apartment voluntarily because the landlord had been negligent on repairs or had behaved inappropriately with the youth.

Some youth reported that they had no problems keeping their home once they found a place to live, but some said that they had to leave their home because of rent increases or problems with their landlord or roommates. Substance use was also identified as a barrier to managing money and regularly paying bills, as was mental health issues, all of which had contributed to youth being homeless in the first place.

Referrals to the Program

According to BYRC staff, most youth are referred to the program by a non-BYRC worker who completes a written referral package. These youth are usually connected to a transition worker, but in some cases youth are accepted as ‘walk-ins.’ Youth have also been referred by peers, but this has been less common than professional referrals.

BYRC data shows that most referrals have come from the South Vancouver Youth Centre, Directions Youth Services Centre and the Urban Native Youth Association. BYRC has also received referrals directly from social workers at the Ministry of Child and Family Development, the Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society and Métis Family Services.

BYRC staff reported that the referral process could be improved by making the forms available online. (*BYRC Comment: good idea and we will follow up.*) They identified that a barrier for referrals is that some youth have support needs greater than the program can offer. Although it is an eventual goal to support young people with more significant mental health needs, this is currently not within the scope of the housing program. However, BYRC staff stated that they do support youth in the program who have mental health needs.

BYRC’s Comment: As noted earlier, the Urban Youth Project, part of BYRC’s Supported Housing continuum, provides housing support to youth with significant addictions and mental health needs.

Non-BYRC transition workers reported no difficulties with the referral process, and found it simple and quick. They had learned about the program through their city-wide network of housing workers. The transition workers recognized that the BYRC housing program is not for all youth, and only referred youth who they felt would be appropriate. One worker had only referred one youth to the program, while another had referred six youth to BYRC housing in the previous year.

Youth also had no complaints about the referral system, and reported that they had come to the program from a number of different services. Some young people went straight to BYRC on their own or with their transition worker, while others were referred from other local programs such as Directions Youth Services Centre or by social workers. Multiple youth discussed how easy and straightforward the referral process was. The youth did know how to refer their friends, but generally had not done so. The most common reasons for not referring friends included their

peers not being interested in the program, and participants not wanting their friends to know about the program because they felt that living near or with them would make their own progress more challenging.

Youth Intake and Move In

“I am happy how fast it was for me to get in the program.” – Youth participant

Intake

The BYRC case manager interviews youth who are looking to join the housing program, and the interview usually takes between 10 and 45 minutes. The case manager attempts to identify the unique requirements of each youth and determines if he or she is appropriate for the program. The case manager also follows up with social workers and other professionals on youths' needs.

BYRC staff reported that approximately 75% of youth who are interviewed are offered and accept housing through the program, and the non-BYRC transition workers reported that they only knew of one referral who had not been accepted. According to BYRC staff, the most frequent reasons for youth not being accepted included having an active addiction, being unable to afford the rent, or needing mental health support that the program could not provide. There were some youth who had specific challenges, such as anger management difficulties, that made them inappropriate to live in the shared house, but who were accepted into the scattered individual suites.

Most youth found the interview process to be an easy and enjoyable conversation, with some participants reporting that they discussed future goals and other life plans. The youth who lived in the shared housing unit emphasized the importance of the interview process for identifying if the house was appropriate for them and if people who are going to live together are well matched.

Unit viewings

If youth are accepted into the program, the case manager takes them to view available suites. The landlords are not present at the viewings, but a transition worker or another professional supporting the youth is often present. The viewings are to ensure that the youth feel they can successfully live in the suite.

There is often a waiting list, which varies in length depending on what type of suite the youth is looking for. At the time of the evaluation, the wait list was 14 youth; however, one staff member reported that the waiting list has been as long as 20 youth for certain units. Some youth reported waiting for four to five months, while a few were able to move into vacant suites immediately. The non-BYRC transition workers had not seen many unsuccessful unit viewings. By the time youth see the suite, they have a good idea of what to expect from the program, and it is rare that they do not take the suite after seeing it.

Move in

Youth have to sign a contract before they move in. At move in, the BYRC housing support worker is present and a condition inspection is done. A start-up kit is provided where needed.

Landlords are often not present when the youth move into their new suite. Some landlords do not meet their new tenant until they are called in for repairs. BYRC staff take on the responsibility of assisting youth to move in and out, and landlords reported that having the case manager and other BYRC staff coordinating the viewings and move-ins is a plus for them.

For the landlords, one of the perks of taking part in the program is their limited interactions with the young people. For units not rented out to BYRC, the landlord has to both find a new tenant and organize all tasks around moving in every time a tenant leaves. In contrast, for units that BYRC rent, there could be multiple tenants that move in and out without any extra work for the landlord.

The landlords explained that although they are not typically involved in bringing the youth to the suite, the case manager informs them when a youth is moving out and another is moving in. One landlord reported that he receives a background profile of youth when they start living in one of his suites, but does not meet them before they move in. (*BYRC's Comment: Agency policy on client confidentiality does NOT permit us to provide information about a young person to a landlord or other.*) Another said that he would like the opportunity to meet the youth before they took over the unit.

For most youth, moving in was a straightforward process. Many reported that the units were clean and functional. However, several youth stated that their new suite was a “mess” when they took over and that they had hoped it would be in better condition. One youth reported that after moving in, BYRC staff helped to clean, decorate and furnish the unit. (*BYRC's Comment: Funding challenges do not allow us to leave a suite empty and we agree there have been times when a suite has been completely clean when a new youth has moved in.*)

Some BYRC staff felt that the rush to get a suite cleaned after one youth moves out and before another moves in is the most stressful part of their job, especially if more than one youth is moving out that month. They explained that suites are often not ready on time; because BYRC does not have a budget to keep the unit empty while cleaning and maintenance are done, those tasks are either rushed or completed after the youth move in. Having more time available to complete these tasks was one of the top recommendations from BYRC staff.

Start-up kits and other supports

“Everything I’ve asked for support I’ve received.” – Youth participant

Moving in to the new suite can be difficult for youth who were previously living on the street and do not own basic household items. BYRC provides start-up kits that are individually tailored for each youth. Youth have frequently requested bedding, cleaning or cooking supplies, toiletries and parenting supplies. BYRC typically develop five to seven kits per month, at an average cost of \$150. According to BYRC data, 86 youth received start-up kits from BYRC in 2009/2010. Although the non BYRC workers believed that the youth had been given a start-up kit at move in, none of them had seen one or knew what it was comprised of. Youth who received start-up kits reported that it had contained useful items that had helped to ease the transition into their new home. One youth reported that the start-up kit provided items that she had not thought she would have needed, and that BYRC did a good job of anticipating her needs.

BYRC's Comment: Kits are provided on a "needs" basis and not all youth get BYRC start up kits. If youth is in care of MCFD or VACFSS, those agencies are expected to provide the youth with funds for a start up kit.

Some youth reported receiving help with furniture but others did not need such assistance because some of the units were fully furnished. Youth in the shared house reported that most necessities were already there when they moved in.

The transition workers explained that they try to find other support services and funding for the youth when they move in, to help with other essential items.

67% of youth who completed the survey indicated receiving a start-up kit from BYRC, and all were 'very satisfied' with its contents.

Printed material

Some youth recalled receiving printed material, detailing the expectations of them living in the unit but most said they had not been given this information or did not remember it. Many of the youth did recall going over the rules and some key information at move in, and understood what was expected of them. One suggested that important information could be laminated and attached to the door of the suite to ensure that it was available. However, another pointed out that having rules pinned up could take away the feeling that the place is their home.

BYRC's Comment: We will arrange for all youth to have their own housing manual.

Sense of Home

For most of the youth, their suite quickly felt like a home and they reported taking pride in it. However, the knowledge that they would have to move out when they reached a certain age prevented some youth from becoming too attached to their unit. Another concern was that if their financial circumstances deteriorated they may be unable to afford continuing to live there.

BYRC staff believed that most youth in the shared house would choose to continue living there if they had more income, but those in the scattered suites would not. Staff felt that although the participants appreciated the extra support, the suites were modest and many would likely choose to move closer to where they 'hang out.' In contrast, most youth reported that they would choose to continue living in the BYRC program even if they had more money. Among youth who would choose to move, it was either because they wanted to live in a nicer home or it was about making positive life changes and moving away from old lifestyles.

Youth in the shared house reported that they would prefer to continue living there when they finish the BYRC program. They stated that living in that house has taught them everything they "need to know." They felt comfortable there and were on track in their lives. Some suggested that they would like to continue living there after completing the program, as an adult mentor to the younger tenants. One participant suggested that a second shared house exclusively for single mothers would be very helpful. Many youth in the scattered suites also said that they would like to continue living in their current units after finishing the program. One participant said that it had become his home, and his neighbourhood. Another youth had been on the waitlist for

other housing options for four years, and wanted to stay in his current living situation until he knew he had another place.

Most of the landlords were undecided on whether the youth would want to continue living in the suites once they finished the program, although one landlord was under the impression that the youth enjoyed living there.

Feelings of Safety

The BYRC staff and landlords believed that most youth felt safe in their suites. All of the youth in the shared house did report feeling safe, and the majority of the other program participants also felt that their suite was safe. However, several youth were concerned about other tenants in their building who were not in the program. Sometimes these neighbours were disruptive or used substances, and this took away from how comfortable the youth felt in their apartments, especially if they had children.

When one youth had a break-in, BYRC staff came to the unit to help, and as a result it felt safe to remain in the suite. Other youth also reported feeling more secure knowing that they could contact their housing support worker if they had to.

Among youth who completed the survey,
89% indicated feeling safe where they are currently living.

Maintenance of Suites

BYRC staff explained that the BYRC case manager is in charge of repairs, and is assisted by an on-call handyman. In most situations, BYRC attempts to do the repairs themselves. However, BYRC staff reported that there have been frequent conflicts with landlords over performing maintenance and repairs that were within the landlords' purview. In one suite the oven could not be easily fixed, and the landlord took several months to complete the repairs.

The landlords stated that they dealt with major repairs (e.g., fixing a stove or refrigerator) or property maintenance (e.g., fixing the mailbox). One landlord reported taking care of the vast majority of repairs while another said he had yet to be called to do any repairs to his suite. However, landlords also commented that if the youth had caused any damage, they or the case manager were responsible for the repairs. None of the landlords reported any conflicts to date over maintenance to the suites.

Youth not knowing their rights as tenants was identified as a top concern by BYRC and non-BYRC staff. Most suites that fall within the price range of the youth in the BYRC program are run by landlords that tend to be less hands-on, and are less responsive to maintenance and upkeep issues.

BYRC Comment: As noted, our Housing 101 workshops which cover many topics, including tenant rights, is compulsory for all.

The non-BYRC transition workers had seen their clients experience landlords not performing repairs or maintenance promptly, and gave several examples of problems such as a broken oven, infestations and an inconsistent water supply. In these situations the transition workers praised BYRC staff for being persistent with the landlords and strongly advocating for the youth, but acknowledged that in the end it is the landlord who will choose whether or not to make repairs. The transition workers had been able to help with smaller repairs and had witnessed BYRC staff help with maintenance in creative ways, such as by using a youth's damage deposit to help pay for repairs. The non-BYRC transition workers unanimously agreed that BYRC staff addressed all maintenance concerns promptly.

None of the youth reported having problems with landlords not maintaining their suites, although some mentioned that landlords were inconsistent in completing repairs quickly. This contrasted with the reports of the BYRC and non-BYRC support workers and suggests that some youth may not have understood their rights as tenants or had placed all the responsibility on BYRC staff. The youth all seemed satisfied with the support they received from BYRC on the upkeep of their apartment. Although in some cases the suites were not in good shape when the youth first moved in, a worker from BYRC was quickly available to make repairs, such as repairing holes in a wall, attaching new blinds to windows, and replacing doors. Youth who lived in the Bantleman Court units also had support from the caretaker of that facility for repairs. Other youth who had not yet needed any maintenance done said that they would call the BYRC case manager if they needed to.

Most youth understood their responsibilities to keep their units clean, and staff and landlords agreed that the youth are responsible for general cleaning and upkeep chores. Cleaning is divided between residents in the shared house, and although some youth complained about being reminded to wash the dishes, they all also reported that they appreciated the structure that was in place to ensure the place was kept clean.

Landlords' Interactions with Others in the Program

Landlords and BYRC staff

BYRC staff explained that the majority of communication with landlords in the program is through monthly face-to-face interactions with the BYRC case manager. However, it can be as frequently as twice per week or as infrequently as when the landlord contacts the case manager about a specific problem (most commonly the behaviour of the youth participants). For the most part, BYRC staff felt that the communication between BYRC and the landlords has been appropriate and professional.

Landlords were pleased with the communication with BYRC, and specifically trusted the case manager to promptly deal with any concerns that they brought forward. One landlord did raise a concern that the workers who helped support the youth changed too quickly and that he was unsure who was helping the youth at a given time. He appeared unaware of confidentiality policies in effect within the program and reported he would like more information on the support that the youth were receiving from which workers, and how often a given worker would visit.

BYRC's Comment: New brochures/pamphlets for landlords will provide more and clearer information around our policies/procedures.

Landlords and non-BYRC transition workers

The non-BYRC staff reported that they do not have contact with the landlords in the program. This is to avoid causing too much confusion for the landlords, as most youth have multiple support workers visiting.

Landlords and youth participants

BYRC staff explained that the youth in the program rarely interact with the landlords. Instead the youth contact the BYRC case manager, who acts as a mediator between the youth and the landlord, such as if youth are late with paying their rent. Youth and landlords confirmed that they have little interaction with one another, and prefer going through BYRC staff. The one landlord who preferred interacting directly with the youth liked to make a “casual visit” to the units once a month because he worried that the tenants or their peers may cause damage. (BYRC’s Comment: This would not be acceptable under the landlord tenant legislation.)

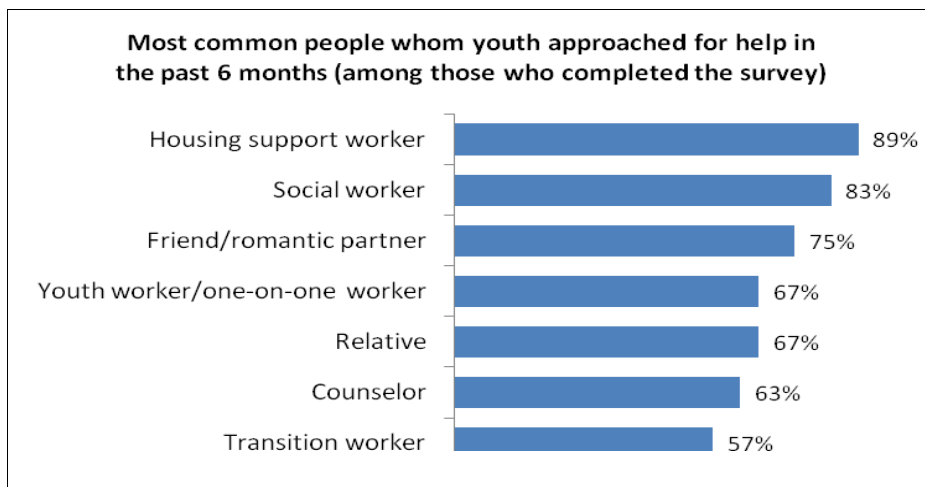
Some youth felt that the landlords could be a positive presence. One recounted developing a strong relationship with her landlord and that she approached him when her neighbours (who were not part of the housing program) were disturbing her. This youth believed that her positive relationship with the landlord helped keep him involved in the housing program.

BYRC staff felt that it is best to keep interactions between youth and landlords to a minimum, as most landlords do not understand the youth or their needs. BYRC staff explained that in their experience, landlords best suited to this program appear to be those who are detached from the youth and their lives, and these are the ones who have remained involved with the program.

Support for Youth Participants

BYRC staff

“The staff help a lot.” – Youth participant



Once the transition into the suite is complete, two full time and one part time BYRC housing support workers and the case manager are available to support the youth. Two of the housing

support workers have a maximum case load of ten youth, and the other half time worker has a maximum case load of five youth.

BYRC staff reported that the program is sensitive to the cultural needs of the youth, but the services they offer have been reduced by the layoff of BYRC's Aboriginal worker due to cutbacks. Other BYRC staff have attempted to help fill this need.

Youth gave both positive and negative feedback on the sensitivity of the program to their needs. Some described having an easy transition into BYRC housing, with workers addressing their specific concerns, from providing child car seats to helping them receive rent subsidies. Other young people felt that the extra support or programming available did not apply to them, or that they had a hard time relating to their worker, which impeded their participation in the program.

According to BYRC staff and the youth, the frequency of meetings with housing support workers varies and depends on the needs of the young person. BYRC support staff reported that when a youth first enters the program, they meet with the youth once a week. The meetings can then be reduced to once every two weeks if appropriate or can be scheduled based on mutual agreement and need, although the staff noted that youth often require more regular support than they initially think they need.

Staff reported that when youth skipped meetings it was usually because they did not feel they needed the support, they felt they had too many professionals involved in their lives, or they did not believe that BYRC workers could offer them anything additional to what other professionals were already providing them with.

Young people who lived in the shared housing reported having BYRC staff at their home approximately twice a week. Youth who lived in the scattered sites reported meeting with their housing support worker as regularly as every couple of days, to as infrequently as every two months depending on their needs. There were few complaints from the youth about the frequency of communication between themselves and BYRC. Youth noted that if they needed to see a worker and did not have a meeting scheduled, they could also drop in to BYRC for support.

BYRC staff and youth believed that the support BYRC has been able to provide young people with has matched the needs of the youth. The workers who had a maximum case load of ten youth had found that they were able to provide the best support when they were working with around seven or eight youth. However, they anticipated that their case load would be rising soon, and that it would be harder to maintain the current level of support, even if the youth have relatively low support needs.

The landlords were not aware of the frequency or type of support that the youth were given, although one landlord commented that the support likely met the needs of the youth, as he had seen youth progress, start school, and eventually move out when they were ready. Another landlord reported that although she did not know about specific support that was in place, she recognized the need for it, and emphasized that these youth need adult guidance, discipline and rules to help them succeed in the future.

Housing support workers highlighted the importance of emotionally supporting the youth by spending time together and talking openly, for example while cooking or grocery shopping together. This informal support was seen as "*a huge piece*" of the program, and could also be used to teach skills such as budgeting.

The type of support given to youth is geared to their specific needs. For youth in the shared housing, they described their support worker as a “*house mother*” who was available to help with most situations, and transport them to meetings. Other examples, reported by youth, included support applying for schools and accessing other needed services and resources.

A few youth in the shared house expressed some resistance to having a caretaker on site, and they resented him for enforcing the rules. They indicated wanting more freedom and independence, however they also reported respecting and appreciating the structure that is in place and the caretaker’s role in ensuring the safety and cleanliness of the house. The youth acknowledged that better communication with the caretaker would help the situation, and suggested that this could be facilitated by BYRC. (*BYRC’s Comment: this is an ongoing process.*)

BYRC staff reported that there were a number of challenges to providing the highest quality of support. It was more challenging if the youth were at widely scattered sites than if they lived in the shared housing. Youth who were in crisis needed more support, which could be difficult to provide particularly at the end of the month. At the end of some months there were multiple youth moving in or out of housing units, and that took most of the housing support workers’ time. It could be more challenging to provide support if the different professionals involved with a youth were not communicating well or were out of sync with each other, which was reported to sometimes occur.

Youth had multiple suggestions for how to further develop the support they were receiving from BYRC. Some wished for more assistance with transportation, more one-on-one time, to be able to choose their support worker, and for additional services and support where they could speak confidentially to ensure they would not lose their home if they relapsed into substance use. *BYRC’s Comment: Our program is not abstinence based, but rather on a harm reduction model. Youth do not lose their housing when they use substances. Our guidelines are: no drug and alcohol use in the home. In the shared home, if youth have used/consumed alcohol, the expectation is they come in and go to their room and not disturb others.*

The majority of youth who completed the survey reported trusting their housing support worker (89%) and that BYRC staff treat them fairly (89%).

Non-BYRC transition workers

The transition workers provide their clients with a wide range of support options, not just around housing, but also with school, life skills, mental and physical health, pregnancy and sexual health, and any other individual needs. The transition workers also reported connecting the youth with other community services. Although they tended to meet once a week, this could be changed based on needs, including meeting outside of regular work hours.

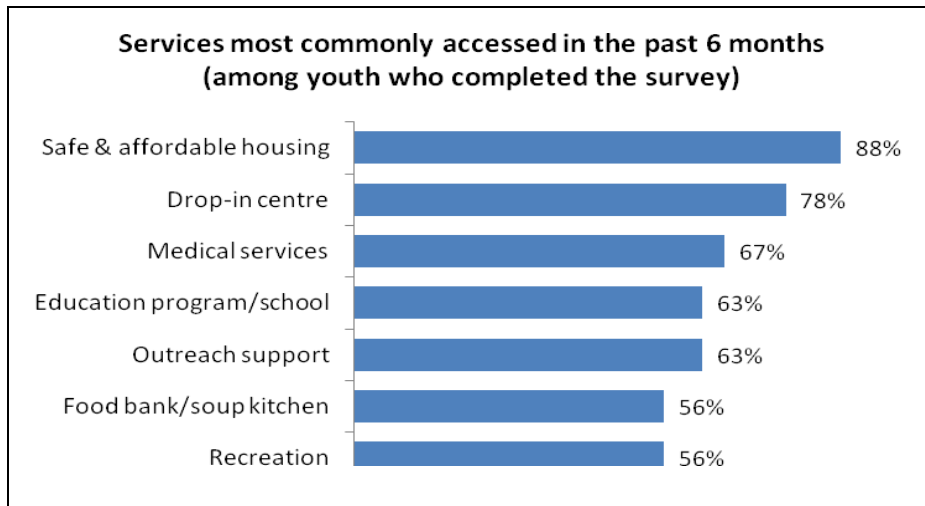
The transition workers reported having frequent and strong communication and a good rapport with the BYRC housing support staff. The BYRC staff and transition workers negotiate their roles in supporting the youth and there is flexibility in who provides support. The exception to this is when youth reach their 19th birthday and the transition worker is no longer involved.

Although not all youth asked their transition worker for assistance in the past six months, those who did reported finding it helpful.

Support from other adults

Transition workers noted that other than themselves and BYRC staff, there were still many avenues of support available for the youth, including drug and alcohol counselling, and mental health support, which continued after they entered BYRC housing. Many of the youth had also been enrolled in alternative education programs, where they had many support options, and some youth still received help from their families.

Among youth who had contact with their parents, some reported that their parents were initially sceptical, or thought that their son or daughter would be living too far away, yet most became convinced that the program was helping. Youth with supportive parents felt that their family approved of them having their own space and that it was not in downtown Vancouver.



Goals and Life Skills

Goals

“The only thing that can hinder me is myself and my attitude.” – Youth participant

BYRC staff explained that youth identify their own goals during the intake process. The staff then conduct review meetings every three months with the social worker, transition worker and housing worker where appropriate. The goals tend to cover some of the same areas as the life skills courses, such as learning to cook and budget money, but also include educational and employment aspirations, as well as becoming involved in counselling or appropriate support groups. The non-BYRC transition workers said that they had not seen the goals that the youth negotiate with BYRC housing staff, and had not heard their clients discuss these goals. The transition workers had often already set goals with their clients prior to them joining the program.

The youth in the program reported a wide range of goals and that they were involved in planning these goals. One exception involved a youth who felt pressured to set goals that she felt were not relevant to her life. For most youth, their highest priority goals were aspirations that would help them maintain their housing or help them in the future, such as staying in school or finding a job, or were based on unique challenges that the youth were facing. Many of the youth reported receiving support to meet their goals, either through dedicating their one-on-one time

with their housing support worker to work on them, or by learning skills through BYRC courses. Other youth reported receiving support to work on goals from people outside BYRC, including parents and teachers.

BYRC’s Comment: We need to ensure there is better communication and conferencing among the involved support personnel that also includes the young person.

None of the youth interviewed felt that their goals were unattainable. Some youth reported that they had already achieved their first goals, including getting appropriate housing or child-proofing their home, and were now working on new goals. Secure housing was key to achieving other goals. For example, one youth reported that having his own apartment gave him the space to do school work, without which he would be unable to stay in school.

The staff believed that the youth tended to show improvement in their goals over the course of their involvement in the program, but this progress was not monitored and there could be multiple barriers to the youth achieving their goals. BYRC staff reported that many youth did not recognize that they needed to work on certain aspects of their lives, or that they had family and friends inhibiting their progress. Some youth pointed out that young people in the program could not set desired goals with BYRC staff pertaining to substance use and going to rehab, for fear of losing their housing.

BYRC’s Comment: See previous comments around youth not losing housing due to substance use.

67% of youth who completed the survey felt that they were involved in their own case management.

Life skills

“I’m gaining knowledge in just about every aspect of my life.” – Youth participant

BYRC staff explained that they host life skills courses once a month, known as Housing 101, which are open to all youth. The workshops feature guest speakers and cover a range of topics, including tenants’ rights, taxes, cooking, financial literacy, living with other people, maintaining boundaries and conflict resolution.

78% of youth who completed the survey felt they were gaining important skills and knowledge through BYRC

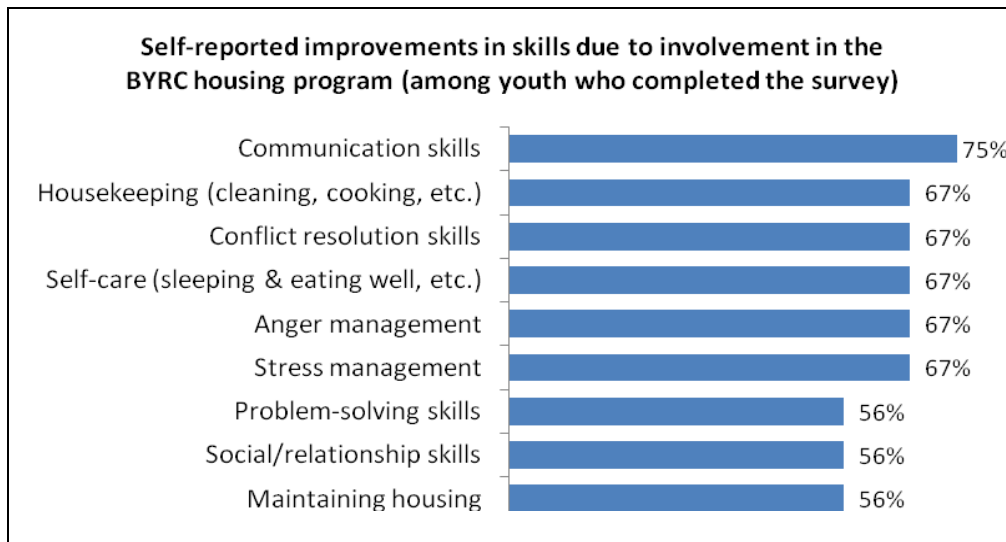
Youth who attended these courses stated having done so not only because of the content and certificates they received, but also for the food and gift cards they got for taking part. BYRC staff believed that for most youth who attend, information on tenants’ rights is the most useful of the life skills topics. The youth who attended agreed that the course on tenancy rights was useful, and 89% who completed the survey indicated knowing their rights and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancy Act, either ‘very much’ or ‘somewhat.’ Youth also said during the interviews

and focus group that they found the course on money management to be helpful; however, 56% indicated on the survey that their skills in budgeting and money management did not improve through their involvement in BYRC, and the same percentage reported managing their money poorly or fairly well (as opposed to well or very well) in the past six months.

The non-BYRC transition workers were not aware of any clients in the program who had taken part in the life skills courses. Most of the young people reported having attended some of the courses that BYRC offers; however, few youth indicated having taken part regularly and most had not been to a session recently. The non-BYRC transition workers posited that these youth were perhaps overwhelmed by numerous service options and had not seen these courses as a priority. BYRC staff explained that youth in the housing program rarely attend because they are often at school or work when the courses are offered.

Youth who did not participate either thought that the classes were not specifically useful for them, felt they were getting the information from other programs or felt that they had no time to take part. Some of the young parents remarked that even if they did have the time available to attend a session, their free time was so precious that they did not want to spend it in a class.

As an alternative to these courses, BYRC staff explained that young people in the housing program learn life skills as part of their one-to-one time with their housing support worker. The BYRC staff described how spending time with the youth when they are doing tasks like cooking or cleaning can be more helpful in teaching skills than more conventional training in a group. BYRC staff reported that the youth grew in tangible ways, and also learned about boundaries and how to express themselves. The housing support workers reported that the progress seen in the youth through their time together was among their greatest successes.



Staying Housed with BYRC

“I’m currently having some financial trouble and they are being very supportive and understanding. It’s thanks to [BYRC] that I am not homeless.” – Youth participant

BYRC staff identified three key elements that youth participants had to do to stay housed within the program:

- Pay rent on time (although BYRC is sometimes able to help cover the rent in short-term emergency situations);
- Meet regularly with the housing support worker;
- Work toward their goals.

The youth also identified guidelines that need to be followed to stay in the program. For several youth, the most important rule was no drugs or alcohol in the suites. Many youth appreciated this rule, and identified how keeping substances away from their housing helped them work on their goals. However, youth explained that because the program requires them to be addiction free, some young people have not accessed needed drug and alcohol services because it could potentially jeopardize their home. It was suggested that youth struggling with substance use issues should stay on lists for other housing opportunities and support programs in case they relapse. Youth also suggested that it would be very useful if BYRC develops a program that allows young people to seek drug and alcohol counselling without it affecting their housing.

BYRC’s Comment: See previous comments around youth not losing housing due to substance use.

For youth in the shared house, doing chores, keeping the house clean, and being respectful to housemates were also given a high priority. In the shared house, if youth had taken any substances outside of the house, they had to stay in their own room when they got back home. Young people appreciated that they had the freedom to return to their suites on their own schedule, and there was no requirement to spend the night at their home. Some youth also reported that they needed to be in school, have a job, or be actively pursuing employment. For youth living in Bantleman Court, a new addition to the housing program, there was another contract that had to be signed when they moved in, with different expectations.

According to BYRC staff, youths’ main challenge to staying housed in the program is maintaining boundaries and preventing friends or family members from taking advantage of their situation. BYRC staff said that it is often difficult for them to know whether extra people are living in a suite, but any suspicions can lead to a warning letter and discussion with the youth about this. Staff explained that when youth do not want their friends or family to stay, it is sometimes helpful for youth to blame BYRC rules, because it is an easier way to say ‘no.’ This was confirmed by several youth.

None of the youth who were interviewed reported currently having a problem with friends or family disrespecting their space or violating their boundaries. One youth suggested that increased monitoring by BYRC would help youth participants who found it hard to turn their family or friends away.

Landlords' complaints

All of the landlords reported having to contact the case manager about conflicts with the tenants at some point since starting to rent to BYRC. Concerns ranged from youth making too much noise to situations where young people had been asked to leave the suites.

One landlord had to report youth to the case manager after fights had broken out at the suites. He had mainly been concerned over the damage to his property. Even though he brought these situations to the case manager, he did not believe that he was in a position to ask youth to leave a unit. That was BYRC's decision to make and the landlord was happy with how the situation was handled.

Reasons for leaving

As previously mentioned, almost half (47%) the youth who had moved on from the BYRC supported housing program had successfully transitioned into independent living.

BYRC data shows that seven youth (13%) were evicted by their landlords although three of these were re-housed in other BYRC suites. The other four left the program.

Eight youth (15%) were asked by BYRC to leave the program. BYRC staff explained that this does not happen often, and is only considered as a last resort. Most youth were given multiple warnings before being asked to leave. Reasons youth were removed from the program included non-payment of rent, excessive substance use, and causing problems with other tenants and neighbours. Disruptions attributed to having friends stay at their suite was another reason youth were asked to leave and this was also a rule that had provoked some youth to withdraw from the program on their own.

Some other participants had also decided that the program was not a good fit for them and left on their own, most often because of the rules that program participants must follow. In other cases, young people had been moved to different suites in an attempt to find a better fit for their personality or needs.

The non-BYRC transition workers reported that some youth have had challenges with the condition of their suites, which increased their likelihood of leaving. In the past, some of their clients had lived with rats, no heat, flooding, mould and broken appliances or bathroom fixtures, and at least one youth had left the BYRC program as a result.

BYRC HOUSING DATA	
Total clients housed in the program to date	55
Evicted by landlord and left program*	4
Were asked by BYRC to leave program	8
Voluntarily left program (dropped out)	6
Transitioned to independent living	16
Clients currently in housing program	21

Source: BYRC

*Note: Another three youth were evicted by the landlord but were subsequently re-housed in a different BYRC unit.

Stakeholders' Evaluations and Suggestions

BYRC staff

BYRC staff identified a number of ways they would like this housing program to grow in the future.

- The program should be expanded to offer housing options to a broader range of youth including those with active addictions.
- An on-line referral system could be developed to enhance the current referral process, and written materials made available in languages other than English.
- It is important to ensure that youth are fully aware of their rights as a tenant, even though most youth feel that they know tenants' and landlords' rights and responsibilities.
- The program could develop into a social enterprise, where youth who are housed are also employed by the program. Youth could be hired to help other participants move in or out of BYRC housing, or to perform maintenance on the suites.
- Provide funding so that a suite does not have to be occupied immediately, allowing time for essential cleaning and repairs before the next tenant moves in.
- Increased funding for the program would allow BYRC to subsidize youth who could not pay their rent when between jobs. More funding would also allow BYRC to assist youth with transportation challenges and bring in additional staff.

Non-BYRC staff

"These guys [BYRC] are not just band-aiding, they're actually doing something about the [housing] problem." – Non-BYRC transition worker

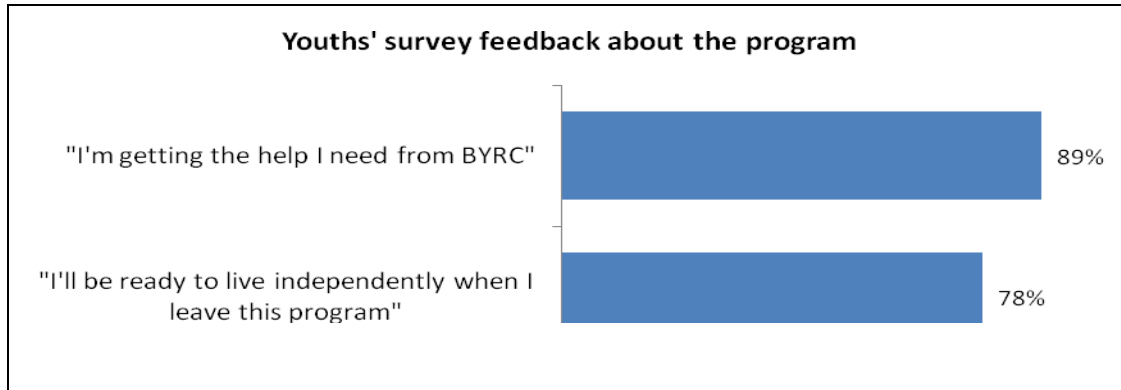
Overall, the workers were satisfied with the program and appreciated how BYRC has helped both them and their clients. The program has taken away some of the most stressful parts of their job, namely finding housing for their clients. The transition workers appreciated that the housing is available for youth up to the age of 24. They acknowledged that BYRC has done a lot of work to make a *"great program which has many successes"* for the youth.

In addition to agreeing with BYRC staff that youth should know more about their rights as tenants, non-BYRC staff made the following suggestions:

- BYRC staff could pre-emptively deal with maintenance concerns before they inconvenience the tenants.
- Have more suites available, as demand continues to exceed supply.

Youth participants

“BYRC has improved my lifestyle, my knowledge, my participation in the community.”
 – Youth participant



All the youth who took part in the evaluation reported being satisfied with the program. For some participants, the workers have been the best part of the program, and many indicated on the survey that BYRC staff are supportive, helpful, and available “*if something goes wrong.*” Some youth acknowledged that their involvement in BYRC has improved their lifestyle, enhanced their knowledge, and is helping them make “*better choices.*” Others identified their roommates, having their own space, and their independence as what they liked most about the program. However, coupled with the independence the youth seemed to appreciate the structure. One youth commented on the survey that “*BYRC is helping me cut down on smoking pot and drinking because it’s not allowed at the house.*”

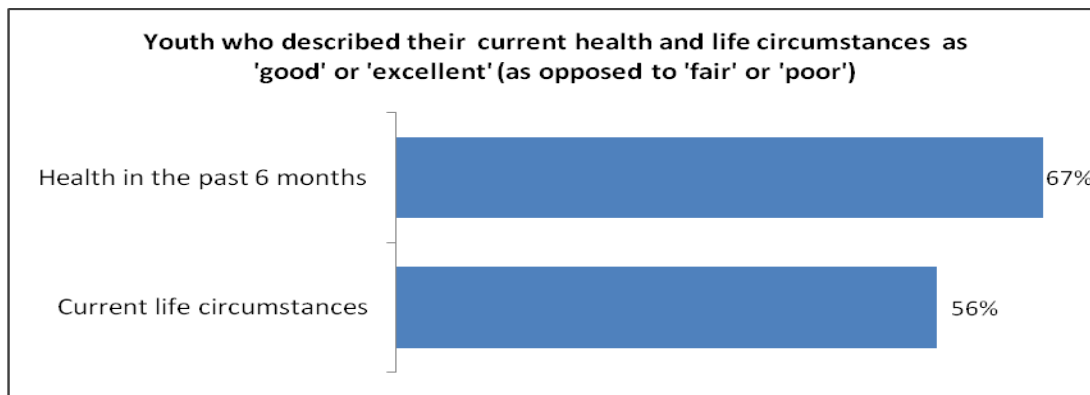
Most participants who completed the survey indicated that their overall mood, self-esteem, and hope for their future has improved ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ as a result of their involvement in the BYRC housing program. However, they reported minimal improvements in their development of job skills and employment planning, and 67% indicated that their involvement in BYRC has not helped to increase their skills in finding a job.

When asked what they liked least about the housing program, the most common responses were the lack of child friendly accommodation, the risk of losing housing if they used substances (*BYRC’s Comment: See previous comments around youth not losing housing due to substance use*) and the proximity of the suites to unpleasant neighbours. The youth participants did not experience any stigma as a result of being part of the program. However, some acknowledged not wanting friends to know because they worried that friends would “*trash*” their place. Most of the young people would recommend the program to other youth, although not always to their friends because they were apprehensive about their friends being in the same program as them.

The young people were asked for their suggestions to improve the program. They all appreciated that more funding would be required to expand and develop the program but suggested the following:

- Make the Bantleman Court complex more of a community, for example with a community room or appropriate group activities. Youth also suggested that an experiential adult could live in the complex and act as a mentor. (*BYRC’s Comment: See comments in Exec summary.*)

- Youth recommended more suites be made available, particularly for young mothers. Their impression was that youth with children spend a longer time on the waitlist. One youth suggested that single parents could be housed together, such as in a complex that has a safe area for children to play. More funding for supporting young parents, as well as a start-up kit geared specifically for them, was also recommended. *(BYRC’s Comment: See comments in Exec summary.)*
- Offer a continuum of housing options so that youth who develop active drug or alcohol addictions do not have to leave the program. *(BYRC’s Comment: See previous comments around youth not losing housing due to substance use.)*
- Assist youth with rides or compensation for transit to attend life skills courses and appointments.
- One participant felt that the program needs better screening to ensure that the housing is appropriate to individual applicants.
- Some of the youth would prefer longer drop-in hours at BYRC or to receive more support looking for apartments outside of the housing program.



Landlords

All of the landlords interviewed stated that they were planning to continue renting suites to BYRC. Even those who had some problems with BYRC tenants in the past were happy with how the case manager dealt with the situation, and were very satisfied with the case manager in general. All the landlords would recommend the program to other landlords, based on the stable rent cheque and BYRC’s accountability. One landlord specifically cited not having to directly interact with the youth as the biggest advantage to taking part in the program.

There were few critiques from the landlords, with most reporting that the program was working well for them at the time of the interview and that there were more positive factors than negative. However, one landlord, who was anxious about the youths’ behaviour, would prefer more frequent unscheduled visits by support staff.

Finally, one landlord commented that the program is “great” at helping young people. He believed that without BYRC’s assistance, few of the youth would have been able to get an apartment on their own. This sentiment was echoed by another landlord who thought that this program was helping youth get their lives back on track.

KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the evaluation indicate that BYRC's Supported Housing Program is targeting the intended population of high-risk youth, specifically those who have experienced challenges finding and maintaining housing. Most of the young people who completed the survey have lived in government care, 'couch surfed', and/or lived in a safe house or shelter at some point in their lives.

Further, the results show that there is a high need for this BYRC housing program. Although many landlords understand that youth face challenges when it comes to finding housing, many admitted that they would not rent to youth who are not part of this program.

The landlords expressed satisfaction with the program. They trust the BYRC staff and appreciate the presence of a case manager who mediates between them and the youth participants. The evaluation highlighted that this mediator role is integral to the smooth-running of the program.

Youth who participated in the evaluation described the BYRC program as unique compared to other housing programs they have taken part in because they not only receive housing but also emotional support when they need it. They seemed to feel that the program strikes a fair balance between providing them with structure and expectations on the one hand, and respect for their independence on the other. Specifically, the structure and rules appear to help the youth feel safe and to work on reducing high-risk behaviours such as substance use, whereas the autonomy enables them to explore on their own and to learn from their experiences while knowing that they can turn to a supportive BYRC worker when needed.

Overall, youth reported feeling safe with BYRC staff and that the staff treat them fairly. Their responses also suggest that although some would choose to leave the BYRC suites if they had more money, most of the young people in the program feel that BYRC housing is their best option, and they feel comfortable and safe there.

Non-BYRC transition workers were also satisfied with the BYRC staff and the program in general. They felt that they have good rapport with BYRC staff through frequent meetings, and appreciated the support that the youth receive through the program. They reported that the program takes away some of their stress of having to find housing for their clients.

BYRC staff, however, described experiencing significant stress around rapidly preparing the suites after one youth moves out and before another moves in. They suggested that having funding to pay the rent while maintenance is carried out would alleviate the time constraints and stress surrounding the preparation of suites for new tenants.

Youth reported that their involvement in the program has helped to increase their skills in a number of areas including housekeeping, self-care and maintaining their housing, as well as in interpersonal relationships such as communication and conflict-resolution skills. They also indicated improvements in their overall mood, self-esteem, and hope for their future as a result of taking part in the program. However, areas in which youth reported minimal improvements were money management, development of job skills and employment planning. If youth could work more on these areas, with support from BYRC staff, they may feel even more equipped to manage independently once they leave the program.

BYRC staff recognized that the housing program is not currently designed for young people with active addictions, and identified this as an area for improvement in the future. They explained that they would like to develop a continuum of housing options for youth with a range of needs, hopefully leading to fewer young people living without shelter. Similarly, the youth participants suggested that the program should be more accommodating to young people with substance addictions so that they could talk openly with BYRC staff about their substance use problems without fear of losing their housing. There also appeared to be some discrepancy in perspectives between youth who believed they may be evicted from their suite for substance use on the one hand, and BYRC's harm reduction approach on the other. This discrepancy could be reduced with clarification of rules and expectations for participants in the program.

Although youth in the program are required to attend Housing 101 training, both they and the landlords were sometimes unsure of their rights. Both parties would benefit from further training around tenants' and landlords' rights and responsibilities.

In terms of the evaluation methodology, the mixed-methods approach involving qualitative data in the form of interviews and focus groups, supplemented with quantitative data from youth surveys, worked well. A challenge with the evaluation was that despite the best efforts of the program organizers, not all workers or youth were available for an interview (only 10 of the 21 youth in the program took part). Some opinions have therefore been missed as a result. Another limitation is that youth and landlords who were no longer taking part in the BYRC housing program were not involved in the evaluation. Consequently, this evaluation does not include the experiences of youth who chose to leave, aged out, or were evicted from the program, or of landlords who chose to stop renting to BYRC.

Despite the methodological limitations, the interviews and focus groups were an effective way of collecting in-depth information and feedback. The evaluation seems to have captured the voices of those involved in the BYRC housing program to provide a picture of the program from the stakeholders' various perspectives.

In sum, those involved in the evaluation (BYRC staff, non-BYRC transition workers, landlords and youth) were very satisfied with the BYRC housing program overall. They also provided suggestions, as described in the previous section, for how the program could build on its strengths to become even stronger in the future.