

**Jordan's Village**  
**A model of housing and comprehensive services**  
**for homeless pregnant and parenting youth**  
**October 2004**

**Young Parents No Fixed Address (YPNFA)** is an interagency network developing comprehensive and coordinated responses for homeless, street-involved youth who are pregnant and/or parenting. It was convened in 1997 by Toronto Public Health at the request of the community agencies servicing homeless, street-involved youth who were pregnant and/or parenting. Members of this network are committed to finding solutions that work, while respecting the young parents and ensuring the health and safety of the children. The need for the network was highlighted when Baby Jordan Heikamp died of starvation in a Toronto shelter in 1997; his mother was a nineteen year old woman who had been homeless for three years. The inquest raised key issues about the need to wrap health, social and housing services around young homeless parents during the prenatal period, at child birth and during postpartum and parenting periods. YPNFA has created responses based on the knowledge and experience of agencies and institutions who work with homeless pregnant youth. The network has established itself as a strong unified entity, and has built trusting relationships with each other and with the population of youth that it serves. The group has collaborated in writing joint proposals and sharing responsibilities and has developed a high level of credibility in the community that serves homeless youth.

**Scope of concern for homeless youth:**

- 6900 youth stayed in Toronto shelters in 2002 (Toronto Report Card on Homelessness, 2002)
- Youth aged 16-24 make up 22% of all shelter users
- 50% of this number are young women; 50% of homeless young women become pregnant
- Board of Health Report 1998 estimates 300 births annually to this population
- October 2002: one night snap shot review of shelters indicated 45 pregnant women, 38 were youth under the age of 24

**Documented risks include:**

- 70% leave home because of sexual or physical abuse
- basic needs are unmet while homeless
- street life is unsafe
- mental health (especially depression) and addiction issues are prevalent
- limited access to health and dental care
- mainstream services agencies create access barriers for this transient, service shy population

**Pregnancy and homeless youth:**

- poor pregnancy outcomes (low birth weights, pre-term labour)
- poor developmental outcomes for children of these young parents
- limited use of system of Young Parent Resource Centres (age restrictions, reluctance to be separated from partner)
- limited informal supports
- history of involvement with child welfare
- multiple pregnancies common
- apprehension by child welfare common
- lack of continuity of support

**Accomplishments of YPNFA:**

- Parent Relief (respite) project run by Jessie's Centre for Teenagers (United Way funded)
- St. Michael's Hospital young parents project: guidelines for hospitals to look at service delivery for early identification of pregnancy and to use a designated interagency team to wrap around and support young parents
- Wrap Around services (Oolagen Community Services) empower young families to stabilize and facilitate the process of developing support systems for the families
- Increased flexibility in existing programs to meet the youth where they are at
- SCPI Support Funding for YPNFA network approved for 18 month period (2004-2005)

**Housing and shelter needs:**

The chaos of homelessness is disruptive and potentially damaging for young parents and their infant children. Child welfare authorities are extremely concerned about the potential impact on young children living in unstable conditions. Stability is essential for the health and safety of the children and their young parents. Shelter and stable housing is an urgent need for this group. See the attached table for a graphic depiction of the gaps in the system.

**The problem:**

- Shelter system has limited capacity for young pregnant/parenting families. What is available is often full
- Young couples have difficult time fitting in to existing shelter options
- No housing units exist for young parents in transition, those who still need some supports to stabilize.
- Specialized supports for the parent and the child that are coordinated and easily accessible are not available.
- Shortage of decent, safe and affordable permanent housing options is apparent.
- Often youth have no housing record; they end up in inadequate, unsafe situations

YPNFA has moved forward in adding to the range of options. There are still gaps, especially for families in transition towards stability.

- Robertson House, a city shelter, now has an excellent prenatal component for young women with capacity of 17 beds.
- Young Parent Resource Centres are active in finding ways to be accessible for the population.
- Recent agreement with Toronto Community Housing Corporation to access 20 subsidized housing units
- Continuing to work with shelter and housing providers to expand their capacity to serve young families.
- Family Residence is developing a response for pregnant homeless couples.
- Young families need ongoing support to maintain their housing and to achieve stability as they learn to parent in a healthy way

YPNFA has developed a model of housing, Jordan's Village, with a range of housing and support services to address these gaps. This housing will provide a comprehensive, community based and collaborative approach to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty and prevent future generations of children being born to homeless women. This level of support will also ensure that the children of these young parents have every opportunity to achieve their developmental potential.

Municipal support will provide for the capital development of the transitional housing.

**Where do we need provincial support:**

- We need to be able to access operational funding for supervision and support.
- We need the flexibility to access existing provincial programs and grants streams such as hostel redirect, hostel per diems, Rent Supplement, recreation and community development grants.
- We need increased funding for existing service providers to enhance their capacity to assist in comprehensive and co-ordinated delivery of service in health, social and housing realms (see attached table for scope of services to be provided by existing agencies)
- We need help in brokering relationships with other Ministries that impact on the lives of these young parents and their children.
- We need financial support in implementing research initiatives that will measure outcomes for this service model.

Alice Gorman, co-chair YPNFA  
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# Jordan's Village

*In House Programs*

HOUSING WORKERS

PARENTING PROGRAMS

PRENATAL PROGRAMS

LIFE SKILLS

COUNSELLING SUPPORT

CRISIS INTERVENTION

ADDICTION SUPPORT/  
COUNSELLING

*Programs in the Community*

PERMANENT HOUSING

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

EDUCATION

DENTAL

NUTRITION

HEALTH

CHILD PROTECTION

INCOME SUPPORT

PEOPLE READY TO GRADUATE

YOUNG PARENTS  
WORKING ON ISSUES

UNSTABLE CLIENTS  
New entrants and people in crisis

OUTREACH/REFERRALS

