Making Money

The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment

Stephen Gaetz, Ph.D.
Bill O'Grady, Ph.D.
Bryan Vaillancourt, BSW, CSW

Central Toronto Community Health Centres

Central Toronto Community Health Centres - 1999

Making Money
The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment

Shout Clinic, 1999

Authors:

Stephen Gaetz, Ph.D. Health Promoter, Shout Clinic

Bill O'Grady, Ph.D. Dept. Of Sociology, University of Guelph

Bryan Vaillancourt, BSW, CSW, Consultant

Research Assistant:
Mairi McKenna

Peer Researchers:
Daniel Andrews
Janice Butler
Jaene Castrillon
Erica Klein
Mathu Linus
Charmaine Pitman

Shout Clinic
Anna Travers, Program Director
467 Jarvis St.
Toronto, ON M5M-3C2
Tel: (416) 927-8553
Fax: (416) 927-9365
Web Site: www.ctchc.com

Central Toronto Community Health Centres
Walter Weary, Executive Director
168 Bathurst St.
Toronto, ON M5V 2R4

This research was made possible with support and funding from:
The City of Toronto
Human Resources Development Canada

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our funders, the City of Toronto, and Human Resources Development Canada.

CONTENTS:

I) Introduction

It is clear that the issue of youth unemployment has garnered much attention in the eyes of the general public, all levels of government, the business community, social service providers and most importantly, with young people themselves. For youth, getting a job and entering the work force is an important step to adulthood; one that promotes self-esteem, helps build an identity outside of the home and increases independence. For Canada as a whole, the importance of providing young people with opportunities to enter the workforce is an issue that commands the attention of all, because when we talk about young people and work, we talk about our future.

In our report**, Making Money The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment**, we are bringing into focus the issues of homeless youth. In 1999, we conducted an "action research" project in which we surveyed 360 homeless youth in Toronto (in addition, 20 taped interviews). Our goal was to determine the needs and capacities of street youth with regards to employment. That is, to understand their current patterns of making money, to assess their employment expectations and "readiness" for work (education level, housing, other supports), their knowledge and experience in accessing the range of employment services currently available, and their capacity for moving into more "legitimate" ways of making money. Finally, we focused on individual and systemic barriers that reduce the employability of homeless youth, particularly in light of recent changes in the social welfare system, public housing and other supports for the unemployed.

Because homeless youth are unable to depend on family support, they MUST make money to survive. This makes the employment stakes even higher than for the general youth population. Sadly, street kids definitely face barriers to making money. Without viable opportunities to generate income, these youth risk spending longer and longer on the streets and, in the process, losing their health, their connections to the mainstream community and their dignity. Many street youth are already involved in earning money somehow: working in fast food restaurants or telemarketing; working in the sex trades; squeegeeing; panhandling; cleaning windshields or selling drugs. These activities reflect a continuum of social acceptability, and in fact several have recently been the focus of public censure by various levels of government.

In response to clear indicators that young people in general (particularly early school leavers) are slow to benefit from our current economic recovery[1], a range of programs and services do currently exist that are targeted at improving the employment opportunities of youth. Yet, it is unclear how successful these are in meeting the needs of the most marginal populations of youth; that is, those living on the streets.

Does employment present the clearest pathway off the streets for homeless youth? We believe there currently exist successful strategies for working with street youth, as well as possibilities for developing innovative, comprehensive and sustainable community economic development strategies tailored to the needs and capacities of homeless and street involved youth. These

strategies must begin with an understanding that the ability to obtain and maintain work is not solely dependent upon individual motivation, job training or skills development. Our key argument is that instead, we must examine the issue from the perspective of the Determinants of Employability; that is, the contextual factors that enable a young person to obtain and maintain stable employment. The key determinants of employability include: The Labour Market; Employment Readiness; Housing; Education; Health and Well-being; Mental Health; Social Capital and Substance Use.

Relative to other young people, homeless youth are greatly disadvantaged in all of these areas. Clearly, we all share the goal of doing what is necessary to help get these young people get back on track as effective contributors to society - whether this means school, jobs or running their own businesses. This goal is not easily attained, however. It can only be achieved through providing an effective range of supports that not only point young people in the right direction, but also present them with a range of choices and options for the future. That is, we must meet the immediate needs of young people, and through doing so we furnish the basic building blocks that act as a foundation for young people to build on and move forward.

II) Methodology

From a methodological perspective, doing research with homeless youth presents many challenges. First, there is the difficulty of providing an appropriate definition of the population. Second, there is the difficulty in establishing a representative sample of an incredibly diverse and elusive population.

For our purposes, our definition of homeless youth (we also use the terms "street youth" and "street involved youth") includes young people up to the age of 24 who:

> "are absolutely, periodically, or temporarily without shelter, as well as those who are at substantial risk of being in the street in the immediate future."[2]

They may be temporarily living in hostels, staying with friends, living in 'squats' or actually on the streets. They may also be living with parents or relatives, but be at imminent risk of losing their shelter. The reality is that over the course of time the majority of street youth move between these various housing situations, and as a result it can be argued that it is instability that mostly characterises their housing situation.

Our study design included structured, self-administered surveys and open-ended interviews. Our sample includes 360 street youth who filled out a self-administered survey. Twenty additional street youth participated through lengthy, taped open-ended interviews. All participants were paid $10 to participate. It is acknowledged that paying participants may skew the sample, however from an ethical perspective it is our belief that the knowledge of these young people has value, and that they should be compensated for their time.

In order to capture a sample of the street youth population that we feel is representative, we conducted the survey at six street youth serving agencies (drop-ins, health clinics, addiction centre) (n=178) and eight street youth shelters spread throughout the City of Toronto (including the suburbs) (n=145) . We also solicited young people for interviews "on the streets" in order to ensure we captured the views of those who aren't connected to street youth serving agencies (n=37). Eligibility requirements included:

- They had to be 25 years of age or under
- They had to have been homeless or without shelter at some time in the past year
- They had to have demonstrated "street involvement" (as indicated through the use of street youth services, and/or present involvement with a street youth peer group).

Our survey instrument consisted of 116 questions, most of which were pre-coded to allow for quantitative analysis. Through this survey we set out to answer the following questions: What are the characteristics of street involved youth and their families? What circumstances led to their street involvement? What kind of participation have they had in the formal economic sector? What is the range of informal economic activities that they are involved in, and why? What are their needs and capacities around obtaining employment in the future? How does their

education, housing situation, health status, mental health, substance use issues and involvement with the law impact on their ability to obtain/maintain employment? From these questions, we intend to paint a picture of street involved youth that explores their needs and capacities with regards to employment and training.

Participatory Action Research

In conducting the survey, we utilized a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which involves including those who are intended as the subject of the research in all aspects of research, including the design, implementation and analysis of the project. In this case, we hired six part-time Peer Outreach workers to assist with the implementation of the survey. These six young people are all street involved, and an attempt was made to include young people who overall would represent a reasonable cross-section of the street youth population (in terms of age, length of time on the streets, gender, sexual orientation, and primary economic activity). All six received training on research design, and participated in the development of the questions that would become part of the survey. They played a key role in selecting research sites where the questionnaire was administered, and were on hand to help explain the project to young people and assist them in filling out the questionnaire, if language, literacy or comprehension were an issue. Because of our interest in capturing the views of street youth who do not regularly access agency services, we utilized the knowledge and connections of our street youth peers in gaining access to such young people, who as a result were directed to agencies where the survey was being delivered, or were surveyed "on the streets".

In addition to the survey participants, 20 other street youth were interviewed at length. This open-ended interview was built around 16 questions and was conducted by the project coordinator. The actual interviews were audio taped and conducted in a variety of locations such as Shout Clinic, Youthlink Inner City, coffee shops and the park. These interviews focused for the most part on the same themes as the self-administered survey, the object being to augment such data with a more qualitative account of life on the street. All subjects took part voluntarily, signed consent forms and received $10.00 for their participation.

Quantitative Data Preparation and Analysis

After data collection was complete, each survey was given a sequential identification number to assure confidentiality. Care was taken so that the identities of our respondents would not be revealed. The next step involved entering the coded data into a database (SPSS). Once the data from our 360 questionnaires were entered, data were subsequently "cleaned". That is, data were checked to ensure that data codes were consistent with the raw data collected from our subjects (cases) of the study. When discrepancies were found between the raw data and the coded data, these were resolved and corrected in the database. After the data were organized and stored in a database, they were analyzed using SPSS uni-variate and bivariate procedures.

II) Background Information

Who are street youth and why are they on the streets?

For those who live in Toronto, it is impossible not to notice the increase in homelessness over the past 10 years. Certainly, those who work with homeless youth (in shelters, drop-ins, health centres) consistently report that the numbers of yong people has been increasing. Nevertheless, while it is difficult to estimate the number of young people who are homeless in Toronto at any given time, we do know this much. The Toronto Hostel Division reports that on any given night approximately 325-340 young people between the ages of 16-24 stay in hostels. Survey research by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto indicates that

> "only 24% of homeless youth consistently use hostels, suggesting adding the numbers of young people who are staying short-term with friends (couch surfing), squatting and without shelter, the real number of homeless youth is likely several times the number using hostels"[3]

Our first major research goal is to understand the background characteristics of street youth; that is, to examine their lives before they wound up on the streets. Young people living in the street and those who run away from home are often romanticised as adventurers setting out to explore the world, or are condemned as trouble-makers who left home simply because they did not "get along" with their parents, being unable to live by their rules. While these depictions may be true for some young people, the reality for most is of course much more complex. It is clear from a wide range of studies of street involved youth in Canada that the causes of homelessness are many, and that young people come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds[4]. Most come from homes where there is a history of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. A significant number are gay or lesbian, and have left home due to conflict with parents or peers over their sexual identity. Some have left home to seek economic opportunities in cities such as Toronto.

In addition, it is worth pointing out that street involved youth come from all kinds of households - rich, poor, middle class. As will be clear, a lack of control and an unbearable home life leads many street youth to leave home. Others are tossed out by parents. Those merely attracted to the "excitement " of life on the streets don't last long; the harsh reality of sexual and physical assault, hunger and sickness is usually enough to dissuade even the most adventurous of teenagers.

3.1 Profile of Respondents

The profile of the street youth population – in terms of gender and sexual orientation, for instance - differs from that of the general population. In terms of gender, 64% of respondents were male and 36% were female. This 2:1 split is consistent with most research on street youth[5], and with the data collected by street youth agencies. The mean age was 21.5, with 91% of males being between the ages of 19 and 25, and 72% of females being between the ages of 19 and 25. The mean age for when they left home was 15.2 yrs old for males, and 14.9 for females. This suggests that homeless youth under the age of 18 are under-represented in our sample. It is

possible that this is because very young street involved youth are not sufficiently accessing street youth services, or that the path to the streets for young people is not linear.

In terms of sexual orientation, 70% of respondents defined themselves as "straight" or heterosexual. Others defined themselves as being bisexual (14.1%), gay (4.6%), lesbian (2.3%), transgendered (<1%) or "not sure right now (3.7%)". Much of the literature on street involved youth confirms that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are over-represented in the street population (estimates ranging from 20 to 40%[6]). It is suggested that this reflects the harassment and rejection experienced at school and/or by care givers that these youth experience.

3.2 Where are Homeless youth from?

In terms of their origins, it is clear that street involved youth are not a homogeneous group. They come from a wide variety of places, and many different backgrounds. What is surprising, is the number who were born in Toronto (30%), which runs counter to the assumption many people have about the transient nature of street youth (that is, that the vast majority are from 'out of town'), and the degree to which Toronto and its services are a magnet for youth. Interestingly, when youth were asked "Where did you grow up?", those who answered "Toronto" or "Toronto most of the time" comprised 47% of the total sample.

Table 1
Place of Birth: Street Youth

Toronto	30%
Other Ontario	28%
Canada (excluding Ontario)	24%
Outside Canada	18%

N=351

When we turn to Table 2, Parents' Place of Birth, we find that few were born in Toronto, although the majority of the sample's parents were Canadian born. It is interesting to note, however, that approximately 40% of the parents of our sample were not born in Canada.

Table 2
Place of Birth: Parents

	Fathers	Mothers
Toronto	9.1%	12.7%
Other Ontario	11.6%	12.7%
Canada (excluding Ontario)	32.5	31.7%
Outside Canada	41%	38.5%
Don't Know	5.8%	4.4%
N=	329	339

This information suggests, then, that the population of street youth differs somewhat from the general youth population in Toronto. For instance, it appears that the diversity of the general

population is much greater, with only 55% being born in Ontario, 5% born elsewhere in Canada and 40% were born in another country (half of whom have come from Asia). Other than English, the most common first languages spoken by Toronto youth were, in order, Chinese, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Greek and Polish.

3.3 Occupational and Educational Background

Our research reveals that, in Toronto in 1999, street youth come from all classes, and not just from low-income families. In order to determine this, Tables 3 and 4 deals with the occupational and educational backgrounds of the parents of the youth in our sample. In terms of father's occupation, close to one half (45%) of our sample reported that their fathers worked in Primary, Processing, Construction or in Transportation jobs. This was followed by 22% in the Managerial or Professional category, while 21% worked in the Clerical, Sales and Service sector. It is worthy to note that 6% of our sample reported that their fathers worked in the military. The remaining 7% were working in "other occupations".

For the mothers of youth in our sample, 17% were reported to be employed in the Managerial / Professional Section (mostly in jobs as teachers or nurses). The occupational category where most respondents' mothers were employed was in the "Clerical, Sales, Service" sector. Another 29% of mothers reported working primarily in the home. Compared to fathers, the mothers of youth in our sample were not likely to work in the Primary, Processing, Construction or Transportation Sector (7%).

Table-3

Parent's Occupation

	Father	Mother
Managerial or Professional	22%	17%
Clerical, Sales, Service	21%	40%
Primary, Processing, Construction, Transportation	45%	7%
Military	6%	0%
Homemaker	0%	29%
Other	7%	6%
N	237	262

Table-4

Parents' Education

	Father	Mother
<High School	30%	29%
High School	17%	23%
Vocational/College	8%	10%
Some University	6%	3%
University Graduate	18%	18%
Post Graduate	10%	8%
Don't Know	10%	7%
N=	301	311

The educational backgrounds of the parents of youth in our sample vary considerably. For example, close to 1/3 of both mothers and fathers did not complete high school. On the other hand, approximately 1/4 had either finished university (with undergraduate or graduate degrees). In fact, when the reported educational attainments of street youth in Toronto are compared with educational levels in Canada as a whole, the educational levels in our sample exceed the national average, as 16% of Canadians over the age of 15 were university graduates according to the 1996 census (www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/htm).

3.4 Families of Street Youth

Research from a number of countries has emphasized the significance of family life - in terms of stable, supportive and safe relationships - as a factor affecting the development of children. Close relationships, family stability and security are seen as significantly reducing psychological stress in young children. While some children cope successfully in the face of family difficulties, others do not. Key to such success and related to resilience, is the formation of secure attachments to a nurturing adult.

The sample was also asked about their relationships with their parents, both growing up at home and at present. One of the more interesting findings displayed in Table 5 are depictions of relationships with mothers and fathers, and how these relationships changed over time. Street youth in Toronto are much more likely to lack contact with fathers than mothers while growing up. And while youth are much more likely to have lost contact with their fathers compared to mothers at the present time, 20% of youth are nevertheless not in present contact with their mothers. The information presented in Table 5 also makes it clear that relationships with both parents have declined over time.

Table-5

Relationships with Parents: Past and Present (percentages)

	With Mother while growing up	With Father while growing up	With Mother now	With Father now
No contact/deceased	3%	19%	20%	40%
Poor	25%	28%	22%	21%
Fair	31%	21%	23%	16%
Good	27%	17%	17%	14%
Excellent	13%	14%	17%	8%
N=	354	350	354	345

While it is clear that street youth come from a broad range of family types in terms of class background, certain features of their family structures are worth commenting on. For example, of our sample, a very high percentage come from homes where their parents are not living together (64%). This can be compared to previous studies of street youth which suggest 47% come from households where parents are divorced or separated[7]. In Canada as a whole, the risk of divorce for newly married couples is roughly 40%[8].

> *"I only lived in two group homes, but I stayed there and I never ever went back home full time. When I was 11, that was the last year I was at home. ... In fact now I don't see my family at all. They don't know where to find me. They know where I am, but they don't know where to find me. They don't make much of an effort, either."* (Angel, 17)

The fact that 43% of our sample reports that they had some history in foster or group homes indicates that for these youth, attachment to a nurturing adult had broken down. There is ample research that suggests that multiple care givers in a child's life impairs their ability to make appropriate social attachments throughout the rest of their lives. The uncertainty and sense of betrayal that a child experiences when passed from care giver to care giver undermines their ability to form trusting relationships with others. This mistrust frequently interferes with an adolescent's ability to make stable, trusting attachments in their social, personal or vocational relationships throughout their lives. It is significant that close to half of the youth sampled have had to endure the trauma of being removed from their parents and taken into care, as these experiences inevitably impact upon their ability to develop appropriate relationships in the future. The difficulties in forming attachments becomes clear when street youth talk about the fact that they were isolated at school or in their neighbourhoods when they were young.

> *"I hated school, every single day of it. It was hell, a nightmare. It was the other kids. I hated them, well they hated me, it was like a mutual thing. I was, like, a nerd, but on top of being a nerd I was poor, so I was a nerd wearing the same grubby clothes every day. I almost had no friends, I had like two friends my whole years at school, like from kindergarten. And they weren't really friends ... they just didn't reject me."* (Bob, 22)

One of the most interesting characteristics of the families of street youth is the high percentage who had one or more deceased parents (17%). Dealing with such loss at a young age has rarely been examined as a factor leading to family breakdown and eventual homelessness. However, other research on homelessness (focusing on the adult population) shows that 'the loss of a loved one' in the year prior to winding up homeless is a significant variable (30.3%)[9].

3.5 Reasons for leaving home

There are many reasons why young people wind up on the streets, some of which have been alluded to above. While most young people are depicted as runaways, the question of whose decision it was to leave home - the parent or child - is much more complex. Over half (56%) the sample reported that "being thrown out" was a somewhat to very important reason for leaving home. When youth were asked "whose decision" it was to leave home, 47% noted that it was "their decision", 18% thought it was based on the decisions of "one or both of their parents", with 30% indicating that leaving home was "a decision made jointly", by themselves and their parent(s).

It is clear that ineffective parenting and socialization issues are key contributors to homelessness. Much of the available research on street youth in Canada identifies abuse - physical, sexual, and emotional - as the primary cause of family breakdown and homelessness for young people. For instance, several studies in Canada have demonstrated that over 70% of their sample identified physical, sexual and emotional abuse as being key factors leading them to leave home[10]. A recent report by the Board of Health also confirms that such abuse transcends class boundaries[11].

The results of our data are consistent with this analysis. For instance, 19% of males and 40 % of females cite sexual abuse as being a key factor leading to their life on the streets, and 39% of males and 59% of females identify physical abuse as also being a factor. These figures are particularly startling when compared to the incidence of physical and sexual abuse in the general population. In a 1997 Canadian study, it was shown that 4% of males and 13% of females under the age of 19 reported sexual abuse, and 31% of males, and 21% of females reported physical abuse (not including spanking or slapping)[12].

> *"I left home because my father was abusive, physically, sexually, mentally. I went through it for years, I blamed my mother because she wasn't there to protect me. I kind of blamed everybody even though my mother didn't know. I blamed her at the time, I was only a kid. That's why I started running. I was only 12."*
>
> (Maria, 19)

Child abuse is a relatively "hidden crime" in that police and children's aid societies both suggest that only a small percentage of cases actually come to the attention of law enforcement authorities. Unfortunately, such abuse is not only a predictor of future homelessness, but may also be a contributing factor to future criminality. A study done in California found that children suffering from abuse or neglect were 67 times more likely to wind up in trouble with the law than children who were not known to child welfare authorities[13].

3.6 Conclusions

It is clear that the paths to the street for young people are complex. Street youth come from all kinds of households - rich, poor, middle class. For the most part, it is an unbearable home life

that leads young people to leave home and wind up on the streets. The very high percentages of young people who were brought up in foster care, and as well, who had 'lost a parent', are also significant factors. For others, it is difficulties at school, substance use issues in the home (either children or adults), lack of social acceptance for youth who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, or difficulties adjusting to the challenges of getting older that are important factors.

In any event, it is clear that many of these factors impede normal childhood development[14], and set many young people up for later developmental problems as adolescents. Manifestations of this are seen in poorer school performance, a greater likelihood to get involved in crime, earlier involvement in sexual activity (and with more partners), more risk-taking behaviour, difficulties in forming attachments and, of significance here, a greater difficulty in gaining employment. It is our argument that had this population sample NOT wound up on the streets, they would likely have continued to have problems educationally and vocationally; their risk for being unemployed as young adults would be higher.

When we consider the employability of street involved youth, then, we must recognize that for the vast majority, involvement in the street youth lifestyle is not about choice. We must also recognize that these young people come on to the streets with many unresolved issues from their earlier home life, and with the added burden of feeling a great sense of loss as they become disconnected from their families, extended families and their communities of origin. They must then face the task of going through adolescent development with very weak social and economic supports. Their ability to move forward - that is, to get a good education, to gain employment, to establish mature relationships - is severely compromised.

IV) Homeless Youth and Employment

How Homeless Youth Make Money

It is clear that poor employment prospects present a barrier to street youth moving forward with their lives. Without safe ways of generating an income, these youth risk spending longer and longer on the streets and, in the process, losing their health, their connections to the mainstream community and their dignity. On the other hand, securing employment offers street youth the possibility of gaining the resources for healthy, stable living. That is, not only can it enable them to generate income, but it also enhances their ability to secure and maintain stable housing, increases self-esteem and decreases social isolation.

4.1 Patterns of Making Money

In this section, we examine the various patterns of making money that street youth employ. In their struggle to survive, it is clear that they engage in a variety of activities to earn income - some of which bring them closer to the economic mainstream than do others. As displayed in Table-6, this range of economic activity can be broken down into five general categories.

Table-6
Main Ways Street Involved Youth Make Money (Past Three Months)

	Number	Percent
Panhandling or Squeegee Cleaning	84	36%
Crime (break and enter) and/or Selling Drugs	43	19%
Social Assistance	41	18%
Paid Employment	40	17%
Sex Work (street prostitution, escort, stripping)	22	10%
N	230	100%

In order to construct these categories, we used a variety of questions to determine what kinds of activities they engaged in, their history of paid employment, and importantly, how they define themselves in terms of the work that they do. Below are some of the key characteristics of each category:

Category 1: Paid Employment

This category refers to young people who are employed at jobs where they are paid a wage for the work they do; wages that can be taxed. Often this is referred to as the "formal economy". Many people assume that street youth in general are unwilling or unable to work in the formal economy. What is surprising is the degree to which homeless youth DO get regular jobs. Overall, our sample reports that they had on average worked at 3.1 jobs in the previous 12 months, and that currently 21% were employed. At the same time, as we report above, only 17% identify "paid employment" as their primary economic activity during the past three months.

Youth in our sample listed many different types of jobs that they were either currently

holding, or had held in the past. For males, the main types of paid jobs included: general labour, painting, welding, bike courier, prep. cook. For females, cashiers, telemarketing, baby sitting and retail sales are examples of past or current employment.

Category 2: Social Assistance

This category refers to young people whose primary source of income came from general welfare assistance, family benefits or disability (ODSP), employment insurance or other forms of government support. Some street youth do identify social assistance as being an important step in getting off the streets.

> *"I don't like being on welfare, but the fact that I have a roof over my head is the one thing I'm very proud of because I spent so many years on the street, working it, living it, I don't want to be back there again. I'm finally making my life work out."* (Jane, 21)

For a group of people who are living in poverty, the percentage who are in this category is low, with over a quarter of the sample who reported they were on social assistance being young mothers. There are several reasons for this, including: a) hostel residents are not eligible for welfare, b) more restrictive rules for welfare eligibility in Ontario for those under 18, c) the general difficulties in obtaining and maintaining benefits when one is without an address, and d) many street youth have politically conservative views about being on welfare.

Category 3: Sex Trade

The sex trade involves a range of ways of making money, including street prostitution, escort services, strip clubs, Internet sex and phone sex. There is an established body of research that points to the fact that many homeless youth engage in sex for money in order to survive[15] . It is also worth pointing out that many others barter sex for a place to sleep at night, or for company. In our sample, 31% of the total reported that they had engaged in either street prostitution, escorting, phone/Internet sex or massage/stripping at least once. This of course includes both men and women. What is of interest here is that this figure is rather high when compared to other research on street youth. For instance, a recent study from the United States reported that 23% of males and 14% of females had exchanged sex for money[16].

Category 4: Property Crime and Selling Drugs

This category refers to young people whose primary economic activity is connected to criminal behaviour such as theft, selling stolen goods and selling drugs. In research on criminology, a distinction is often made between those who engage in crime to survive (lack of food and shelter being key determinants) and those for whom deprivation does not drive their activity[17]. Many street youth relate that they have stolen goods before - if not to convert to cash, to at least meet immediate needs (for food or clothing, for instance). One manifestation of this, and the fact that street youth are a visible target of police attention (for instance, through squeegeeing), is the fact that a large percentage of the sample population have been involved with the justice system. 76 % of males and 52% of females reported that

to have been arrested on at least one occasion in the past. And 63% of males and 36% of females have served time in a jail or detention facility. It can be argued that there are clear situational reasons for this; that street youth, because of their high visibility and lack of private space, are more likely to draw the attention of the police.

Category 5: Panhandling and Squeegeeing

Finally, the group of street youth who engaged in either panhandling and/or squeegee cleaning as a main means for generating income is the largest group of young people. Panhandling refers to the act of asking people for money in public environments, while squeegeeing refers to the unsolicited act of cleaning car windshields for a donation at intersections (for the most part in downtown Toronto). While panhandling and squeegeeing are in themselves quite different activities, they are grouped together because they are key economic activities that are in Canada generally (and almost exclusively) linked to being homeless.

The existing research in Canada on squeegeeing indicates that these youth tend to be fiercely independent and choose to squeegee instead of panhandle (for instance) because of a strong work ethic[18], in which they believe they should provide a service to receive money. This research also indicates that squeegeeing as an activity is associated with "heightened psychological well being, (and) a reduction in criminal activity"[19].

When examining Table-6 above, the most striking thing to note is that panhandling and squeegeeing are by far the dominant economic activities of street youth, with 36% of our sample reporting that this was their main way of making money during the past 3 months. This was followed by property crime and drug dealing, social assistance, and paid employment. While working in the local sex trade was the type of work engaged in by the smallest number of street youth, 10 percent of our sample nevertheless reported that this activity served as their major source of income.

Of course, what is important to remember when considering these patterns of making money is that in reality, most street youth engage in a broad range of activities to survive. Table-7 below provides solid evidence that, while street youth reported that they made most of their money in the past three months by undertaking working in one of five different categories, their involvement in other informal activities was widespread (the informal economy in this case refers to: a) non-taxed economic activity, b) money generating activities that are quasi-legal or illegal). For example, if one examines those who identify themselves in terms of 'paid employment', 47% have also panhandled, and 27% have also squeegeed in the past three months. What we see here is that, reflecting the inherent instability characteristic of their lives, street youth are flexible in utilizing a wide range of strategies to make money. These activities include things such as participating in drug studies for money, selling their belongings, participating in focus groups, lining up to purchase tickets for scalpers, etc.

Table-7

Main way of making money by Participation in past three months

in other informal economic activity (percentages)

	Paid Employment	Social Assistance	Sex	Crime	Panhandle / Squeegee
Panhandle	47	57	47	30	83
Squeegee	27	50	29	15	85
Sex with Person	21	11	65	18	28
Prostitution	15	11	50	6	13
Escort	14	0	37	9	7
Phone Sex	15	7	27	9	10
Stripping	19	11	60	9	12
Break & Enter	34	25	53	80	45
Sell Drugs	59	41	70	86	57
Sell Stolen Goods	30	15	40	73	38
Drug Studies	18	15	27	16	27
Focus Groups	40	20	29	32	39
Odd Jobs	60	40	56	70	57
Scalping	15	5	22	25	12
Scamming	25	32	59	60	33
Selling your stuff	40	50	50	47	55
N=	40	41	22	43	84

The need to employ multiple strategies is at least partly due to the fact that many of these activities produce little income given the number of hours that are put in. Other activities present special risks (the potential of assault, of getting in trouble with the law, etc.) that make them less than attractive occupations to engage in full-time.

4.2 How Background Impacts on Patterns of Making Money

While the information presented up to this point gives us a good description of the various ways in which street youth make money, we have not yet demonstrated the degree to which differences in background impact on patterns of making money. Table-8 provides statistics on several indicators measuring the *backgrounds* of street youth. These measures are cross tabulated with the types of work they engage in most often as a means for economic survival.

Table-8
Main Activity of Making Money by Backgrounds of Street Involved Youth

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Assistance	Sex trade	Criminal activity	Panhandle / squeegee
Sex Male Female	 64% 36%	 66% 34%	 50% 50%	 58% 42%	 74% 26%	 65% 35%
Mean Age	21	21	21	21	21	20
Age first left home	15	15.5	15.6	13	15.5	14.5
Years since left home	5.8	5.7	5.8	8	5.5	6
% who had been in foster home	43%	50%	38%	53%	39%	50%
% who grew up in Toronto	47%	33%	50%	40%	55%	50%
% early high school leavers	57%	40%	52%	80%	60%	72%
% where physical abuse was a reason for leaving home	47%	50%	37%	57%	30%	51%
% where sexual abuse was a reason for leaving home	25%	21%	36%	39%	16%	25%

The second column in Table-8, "Total Sample", provides aggregate statistical information on the backgrounds of our entire sample. The columns immediately to the right contain data concerning these same measures, but calculated on the basis of each of the five distinct income-generating groups as we presented in the previous table.

What this information shows us is that there are clear differences between the employment categories of street youth in terms of their backgrounds. Below, we discuss how some of these background variables relate to the primary ways that homeless youth find themselves making money.

Category 1: Paid Employment For the category of youth who reported that "paid employment" was the their main source of income, compared to the sample as a whole, these youth were:

- more likely to have grown up in a locale other than Toronto
- more likely to have completed high school

The fact that so many homeless youth are unable to maintain steady employment raises questions about the supports that need to be put in place to help young people move forward.

Category 2: Social Assistance Overall, the backgrounds of youth who declared that Social Assistance was their major income source tended to be fairly representative of the street youth population in general, with one exception: street youth who are dependent upon state support are over-represented by females. That is, 13% of males reported that welfare was the main way that they made money in the past three months, compared to 22% of females. This may be explained by the fact that young women are more likely to have dependent children.

Category 3: Sex Work While engaging in sex is a significant economic activity for homeless youth in general, there is a core group of young people who define this as their main source of income. This group differs quite substantially from their other homeless cohorts. The sex workers in our sample were, on average, the group in our sample who:

- left home at a younger age
- have been on the streets the longest
- were the most likely to have grown up in at least one foster home
- had the lowest educational credentials in the sample
- were youth who were most likely to have left home due to problems pertaining to both physical and sexual assault.

Category 4: Property Crime and Selling Drugs Those who define themselves occupationally in terms of theft and selling illegal drugs were:

- predominantly male
- were likely to have grown up in Toronto
- and were the least likely group in the sample to have reported that they left home due to either physical or sexual assault.

Category 5: Panhandling and Squeegeeing Overall, compared to our sample of street youth as a whole, the only distinguishing background feature of this group relates to their likelihood to have been early school leavers. While, as a group, panhandlers and squeegee cleaners were more likely to have completed school if they are compared to those who earn a living in the sex trade, they are, compared to the group as a whole, less likely to have completed high school. What is also of interest, though, is that for those homeless youth who identify themselves with regular employment, crime or sex trade activities, they are more likely to also be involved in panhandling than they are squeegeeing, by a ratio of almost two to one.

4.3 'Choosing' the Informal Economy

Bearing in mind that the vast majority of street youth do NOT consider "paid employment" to be their primary economic activity, a central question must be posed. That is, do street youth engage in the broad range of informal economic activities (including, panhandling, squeegeeing, crime, social assistance) because they prefer these activities to paid employment? Are patterns of making money, then, about "choice', rather than about circumstance and subsistence?

To get at these issues, we asked a number of questions about how they view their current activities, and their desires for mainstream, paid employment. Youth were also asked if their participation in informal/illegal work was something that they would like to work at year round. The responses presented in Table-9 indicate that involvement in such activity is considered for most youth to be short term. For instance, approximately 80% of males and females indicated that they would not like to be squeegeeing, stripping, selling drugs etc., on steady basis.

Table-9

Is Informal/illegal work the economic activity that street youth would like to be doing year round?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Males	22%	63%	14%
Females	19%	65%	16%

N=281

Following this, when asked, "Are you interested in finding paid employment?", an overwhelming 83.4% of males and 87.8% of females said "yes". Street youth do not appear to be a group who are avoiding work.

> *"I like having the ability to bring in my own money and not be depending on welfare. I want to be off welfare. Every time I've gotten a job I've cut myself off welfare, I haven't screwed the system. I hate not working. I deal with an employment counselor twice a week trying to find work."*
>
> (Brian, 22)

The question to be answered at this point is what kind of work are they willing to do? As can be seen, in terms of their desires for employment, they are not too picky. In Table-10 we asked the sample the degree to which they agree or disagree with the following statements. In this table, we are indicating the percentage that "agrees" or "strongly agrees":

Table-10

Attitudes towards 'work'*

	Number	Percent
If I earned $20 an hour, I would take any job	174	53.7%
I'd do just about any job	111	35.5%
Having any job is better than being unemployed	160	51.8%
I'd rather collect welfare than work at a job I don't like	58	18.7%
I would not mind being unemployed for a while	58	18.7%
A person must have a job to feel part of society	111	34.2%

* numbers and percentages refer to those who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement.

When asked about what kind of "regular" jobs they would settle for, the largest response was "anything" (15.8%) with most of the rest of the responses referring to "general labour" or the service sector. Interestingly, the one 'professional' category that stood out in terms of street youth aspirations was social work and other helping professions (6.4%).

As demonstrated above, street youth show a keen desire to find work. To get a better understanding about why youth would then participate in such temporary and dubious activity, our questionnaire asked respondents to list the "top three reasons" why they participated in such work. The number one reason was "to survive", this was closely followed by "to pay for rent", with the inability to get "a regular job" being the third most popular response to our question.

Two additional questions were included on our survey so that we could arrive at a better understanding about why street youth would "choose" to be involved with such undesirable economic activity. First, when youth were asked what were the "top three things they liked least about this way of making money" being "hassled by police," "not making enough money" and "abuse/humiliation" were the most prevalent responses.

> *"I find panhandling degrading. Here I am panhandling and the next day I go for a job interview and the guy who's interviewing you I asked for money the day before, or I meet the parents of my old friend from public school, people you don't want to know and they know you and see you and treat you like a sympathy case, to want to take you for food."*
>
> (Steve, 19)

When the sample was asked what they identified as the barriers to getting a regular job, their responses focused on material barriers such as inadequate housing, no phone and not enough money to travel for job searches, rather than on their own deficiencies (except for "lack of work experience"). In Table-11, clients rate the importance of a range of variables as being key barriers to employment:

Table-11

What stops street youth from getting jobs?*

	No.	Percent
No Address	119	45.2%
Lack of work experience	117	43.3%
No phone	116	44.5%
Transportation (Not enough money for a job search)	104	40.2%
Don't have the right clothes	91	34.7%
Appearance	62	23.9%
"I have trouble following through on things"	55	21.3%
Legal problems	50	17.7%
Problems waking up on time / keeping to a schedule	50	20.0%
Don't want a job now	46	17.4%
Don't know how to get a job	44	17.3%
Health problems	40	15.8%
Age	37	14.1%
"I'm earning enough money already"	31	12.2%
Difficulty reading, writing	20	8.9%

* Numbers and percentages reflect factors respondents rank as "very important".

Note: because different numbers of youth responded to each variable, percentages may differ.

Females tended to rank "lack of work experience" as being more significant than did the male sample, whereas males ranked "legal problems" and "don't want a job right now" higher.

Finally, in spite of what are dire circumstances for many, they are overall a fairly optimistic group. When asked how hopeful they were of getting a better job, 46.6% responded "very hopeful", 35.7% "somewhat hopeful", and 11.8% were "not hopeful". Females tended to be more pessimistic than males (39.5% suggesting they were "very hopeful", compared to 50.7% of

the male sample).

There is often a perception that homeless youth are satisfied with their lives on the streets, and aren't motivated to do anything other than squeegeeing and panhandling, for instance. What we found is that street youth are motivated, do have ambitions and generally are not 'attracted' by the lure of welfare. At the same time, it is clear they experience significant barriers in moving into the formal labour market.

4.4 Conclusions

Considering these results, it is clear that the types of economic activity engaged in by homeless youth is not a random phenomenon. Indeed, the "choices" that street involved youth make in order to survive are shaped by the lives that they had experienced prior to being on the street, as well as being related to their experiences while on the street. The youth who appear to be the most disadvantaged, both in terms of their past and present circumstances, tend to be associated with economic activity which is rooted in the sex industry. On the other hand, street involved youth whose main source of income was generated in the formal, paid employment sector of the economy, generally had relatively less traumatic childhoods, and were in a little better shape while street involved.

What is clear is that people on the streets are not choosing to be involved in the sex trade, panhandling or squeegeeing over "paid employment" because they enjoy it or see it as a career path, but rather, because given their life circumstances, it is the most viable means of generating income that they are currently able to engage in.

The questions that remain have to do with the impact that these young people's current life situations have on the work that they do. If background characteristics predispose groups of street youth to certain patterns of making money, then it is clear that key situational variables (such as housing, mental health, substance use, etc.) will also be connected to how young people make money. If we hope to move more street youth into the mainstream, formal economy (paid employment), then it is necessary to understand these factors, and the numerous barriers young people face in achieving enough personal stability in their lives to enable the maintenance of ongoing employment.

V) Determinants of Employability

As is clear from our sample, street youth engage in a variety of activities to make money to survive, ranging from employment in the mainstream economy, to panhandling and squeegeeing, government assistance, the sex trade and criminal activities. These activities reflect a continuum of social acceptability, and several have in fact been the focus of public discussion and censure by different levels of government.

It is important to consider that, relative to the other categories of making money, "paid employment" carries the most legitimacy in the eyes of the general public and policy makers. However, the fact that so may street youth have had some form of paid employment over the past year, yet so few are able to maintain it and / or identify this as their primary source of income raises the question of whether employment on its own really presents a clear path off the streets.

If our goal is to move more young people into the realm of mainstream paid employment, we need to better understand the factors that enable this to happen, and at the same time, what barriers prevent young people from reaching their potential. That is, what factors predispose some homeless youth to rely on panhandling as a way of surviving, as opposed to getting paid work on a consistent basis.

If we focus merely on individual motivation, job training and skills development, we are only understanding part of the picture. We cannot hope to deal with street youth unemployment without also focusing attention on other issues that affect employability. For homeless youth - in fact, for anybody - employability is dependent on a range of other factors that make working at a job possible. For our purposes here, we will refer to these factors as the ***Determinants of Employability***; that is, those psycho-social and contextual factors that predispose anyone to obtain and maintain employment.

To better make sense of our model of Determinants of Employability, lets briefly examine what enables a typical teenager to get a job. Most young people do not have to worry about whether they will eat and do not need to be concerned about where they will sleep. Their home provides shelter, safety from strangers (note: homeless youth are amongst the most victimized segment of the population in terms of assault), warmth and refuge. It goes without saying that proper nutrition, rest and safety are essential to maintaining employment.

The fact that most youth have an address, telephone and money for transportation means that conducting job searches is easier, and that at a minimal level, they are more attractive to employers. Of course, home is more than merely a physical space. Most teenagers can also count on a broad and diverse range of social supports - including their parents and family, friends, neighbours, teachers and counselors, etc. - to provide emotional support and encouragement, nurturing and mentoring, educational support AND in some cases, the connections needed to get work. All these factors enable a young person to pursue employment.

Nevertheless, as we all know, even in our current economic expansion, it isn't so easy for young people to get jobs (see section 5.1 - The Labour Market). Having said this, it is worth considering the consequences of underemployment for the average teenager - a lack of spending money, an inability to develop a strong resume, and potentially low self-esteem. For homeless youth, the stakes are much higher. Underemployment also means extreme poverty.

If our goal is, then, to assist homeless youth and help them get off the streets through greater opportunities for employment, we need to understand the context in which this quest for employment takes place. The key Determinants of Employability to be discussed here include:

- **The Labour Market**
- **Employment Readiness**
- **Housing**
- **Education**
- **Health and well-being**
- **Mental health**
- **Social capital**
- **Substance use**

In the following discussion, our goal is to understand the relationship between the determinants of employability, and the selected economic activities of the different groups of homeless youth - and associated patterns of making money - described in section 4.

5.1 The Labour Market

One's ability to obtain employment is invariably related to the availability of jobs. Since the mid 1990s, Toronto has seen its economy grow. At the same time, the unemployment rate has dropped to its current level of 7.4% from a peak of 13% in 1993[20] (national unemployment rate: 8.2%). For young workers aged 15 to 24, the unemployment rate is considerably higher. Currently, it stands at 14.7%, and in fact would likely be much higher had not labour force participation rates dropped dramatically throughout the 1990s, as more young people dropped out of the labour force to return to school or quit looking for work entirely. In real numbers, this means that over 24,000 young Torontonians are out of school and actively looking for work. Given that the national unemployment rate for people aged 15 to 24 is 14.9%, it is clear that young workers have *not* been the main beneficiaries of the economic recovery in Toronto.

As mentioned above, the employment rate for street youth in Toronto is 21% (in terms of paid employment, taxable income). In a competitive job market, the jobs that street youth are often able to get are amongst the least desirable, making "moving forward" a difficult task even when they find employment.

> *"What skills did you learn at these jobs? It depends on what point of view you have. At my last job I think I learned that people really don't have any morals and the world truly sucks. I was starting to be optimistic for a while but that whole experience taught me otherwise."*
>
> (Johnny, 22)

It is this labour market context in which homeless youth must compete for work. As will be

evident below, there are many factors that diminish the ability of homeless youth to compete successfully in this labour market.

5.2 Employment Readiness

By employment readiness, we are referring to a range of factors that prepare one for the task of seeking employment such as job search and interview strategies and techniques. This involves knowledge of how to look for a job, how to prepare a resume, and experience with interviews. Also significant are the resources necessary for job searches, such as appropriate clothing for an interview, an up-to-date resume, a telephone number for call-backs and money for transportation to get to job interviews.

To ascertain certain key indicators of employment readiness, we asked a number of questions. In Table-12, we can see the percentage of clients who responded "yes" as to whether they had the following:

Table- 12

Employment Readiness – Affirmative responses

	Total	Male	Female
Do you have a resume?	61.5%	66.1%	53.5%
Do you know how to put a resume together?	74.2%	78.4%	66.7%
Do you have good clothes for an interview?	57.0%	59.0%	53.5%
Have you ever been taught how to do an interview?	62.6%	64.3%	59.7%
Do you have people you can use for references?	65.7%	65.2%	66.7%
Do you have a phone number for job call-backs?	59.6%	55.9%	65.9%

These figures show that between 60 and 70% of the total sample feel they have some degree of employment readiness. Females are less likely to report readiness than males in most categories. What is particularly significant here is that 30-40% of the total sample lack the most basic elements of employment readiness, and are clearly in need of more supports and training to prepare them to move into the world of work.

In Table 13, we attempt to determine the employment readiness of the different categories of street youth. We used the question, "Do you have a resume" as a baseline indicator of employment readiness, and perhaps not surprisingly, those in the sex trade, and panhandlers / squeegee kids fared the worst, while those who had paid employment and those on social assistance were most prepared.

Table:13

Patterns of Making Money: Employment Readiness?

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
Do you have a resume?	61.5%	91%	80%	53%	74%	49%

As an indicator of the degree to which street youth are accessing the broad range of employment training programs, we asked them if they had received "Employment Counseling", and 33.4%

responded that they had (37.0% of males and 33.4% of females). When asked where this counseling occurred, 73 responded, and listed a wide range of places. Of interest here is the fact that 52 of 73 (71.2%) identified street youth serving agencies or other services geared to low income and marginalized youth as the site of their experience. This broad range of points of contact reflects both the diversity of training programs and services offered by the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments, and the effectiveness of training models based on outreach.

Of those who had received employment training, we asked them what the most important result of the counseling was. In Table-14, we present the affirmative responses of clients to a series of statements regarding this issue.

Table-14

What was the most important result of this counseling?

	Total "yes"	Male "yes"	Female "yes"
Learned how to put together a resume	59.6%	58.3%	62.8%
Learned how to look for a job	52.1%	51.1%	54.2%
Learned about the kinds of jobs available	49.6%	46.4%	47.2%
I got a job	49.5%	57.1%	31.4%
I'm more confident	42.0%	44.0%	37.1%
I'm more confident in job interviews	42.0%	41.7%	42.8%

Several points stand out. While male and female responses to each question were closely related, females were less likely to have obtained employment as a result of the intervention, and possibly as a result, were also less likely to report an increase in confidence.

A final point is that many street youth, while appreciating the value of employment training programs, are at the same time seeking the opportunity to move more directly into mainstream employment. Unfortunately, in this job market of high youth unemployment (see section 5.1), training does not inevitably lead to work.

> *"I mean, the programs I were in, the people were cool, tried to be helpful and stuff, I got something out of it, but it was all pre-employment type stuff. When it came time to actually find a job they didn't have much to offer."*
>
> (Randi, 21)

Impact on employability: Many street youth are not ready for regular, ongoing employment. For some, because their focus must be on day to day living, a regular job is not in the short term realistic. In fact, a third identify that they lack basic 'employment readiness'. However, for over half of those surveyed, they do in fact have basic job search skills such as resume writing or know how to 'present' at an interview. Women fare worse than men in terms of employment training. While the high percentage of those that do have job readiness suggests that the range

of youth employment supports in Toronto[21] that specifically target street youth appear to be doing an effective job in this area, it is clear that more resources need to be directed to the 30-40% who lack work readiness. What must be examined, then, when looking at the inadequate level of employment readiness, is the impact of other determinants of employability.

5.3 Housing

Affordable housing is clearly a basic need for people in Toronto, and a necessary resource for the maintenance of employment. Unfortunately, while Toronto has a disproportionate percentage of low income households in the Greater Toronto area, low cost affordable housing is scarce[22]:

> "The yardstick for housing affordability is 30 percent of income spent on rent. The percentage of tenant households that pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent has increased dramatically from 33 percent of tenant households in 1991 to almost 45 percent in 1996."[23]

Low-cost affordable housing is connected to employability in the following ways. If one has safe, secure shelter, an individual has the potential to have more control over their life, and create the structure and habits to allow them to sleep more regularly, to eat more consistently, to feel safe and develop an identity. Affordable Housing is perhaps THE key factor in stabilization.

Of course, one of the key variables that characterizes the life of street youth is unstable housing. At the time of this survey, the housing situation of our street youth sample can be summarized as follows: 60% reported that they were currently staying in one of Toronto's nine youth shelters (and some in adult shelters). It should be noted that because of our research methodology, the percentage of street youth who report staying in shelters is probably over-represented, and those who live on the streets are under-represented. While shelters offer a degree of refuge and play an important role, they cannot be described as a 'solution' to street youth housing problems. Shelter life is by definition temporary (all have limits on how long you can stay) and in the last year, have been at full capacity on many nights.

In terms of those whose housing is most precarious, 4% reported that they were currently staying in squats (abandoned buildings), and 9% are living "on the streets" (parks, alleys doorways). The reasons for staying in these circumstances are complex, and are related to the shortage of housing and shelter space, the desire of many street youth to retain autonomy, their resistance to structured environments with rules, the wish to retain their pets (dogs are often kept for safety) and the desire of many to stay with partners. At the same time, such living conditions do present numerous risks to health, hygiene and safety and make getting adequate rest virtually impossible. Finally, 22% suggested that they were living in apartments or housing- though, for 92% of this sub-sample, this meant sharing apartments with friends, or couch surfing. It should be noted that

these same youth also overwhelmingly report a wide range of living conditions over the previous six months, so we can only infer that apartment living does not characterize housing stability.

The harsh reality - in fact, a key characteristic of their lifestyle and circumstances - is that in a typical year most youth move between these various housing situations. Staying in shelters is by definition temporary - street youth typically stay for a short time (up to two weeks) and use only 13% of bed nights in Toronto[24]. Living on the streets or in squats carries huge risks, and is for many a seasonal activity. Getting an apartment is often only a temporary move, as the expense of supporting even the most modest bachelor apartment or room in a shared apartment is beyond the scope of most street youth.

> *"Not having a place for me was mostly about income and problems with landlords - you can go see the place but as soon as they see what you look like the place is rented ... or (they ask for) credit checks when you don't have any credit ... so I'd always tended to go for the landlords that wanted the money ... these slumlords who wanted the cash ... they weren't very nice places which was one of the reasons that I didn't stay in places very long."* (Anna, 18)

Shelter and Housing, and Patterns of Making Money

If we examine shelter and housing in terms of the five categories of employment (Table-15), it becomes clear that some street youth are more disadvantaged than others

Table-15

Where are you currently staying?

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
Shelter	60%	75%	58%	58%	80%	47%
Own Place	25%	23%	52%	35%	11%	23%
Street	15%	2%	0%	6%	9%	30%

Those who have been on some form of social assistance most recently are the most likely to be housed, or to have stayed in shelter. The high percentage on social assistance who also report staying in a shelter reflects the large number who have just come on to social assistance, and the large number who are no longer eligible. At the other end of the spectrum, those involved in squeegeeing and panhandling are the least likely to have stayed in shelter, and are most likely to be living on the streets. This suggests that they are the most vulnerable group and perhaps the least stable. Their employment prospects (in terms of getting paid employment) are perhaps the lowest of all street youth.

Impact on employability: Lack of stable housing affects employability in the following ways: No phone for job search or call-backs; no address to put on resumes (a real confidence builder for potential employers), a limited ability to present a nice, clean appearance for job interviews

and to maintain interview clothes. Once a job is obtained, lack of housing means: inability to get proper rest, to keep healthy or to maintain the necessary structure in one's life (eating regularly, preparing food for the next day, keeping track of time) to facilitate maintaining employment.

> *"My housing situation has never been stable. I'd be there (at work), sometimes with no place to go at night, then I'd be exhausted at work. I didn't think it was cool to tell the boss I had nowhere to live. A lot of times I would just not be able to go back to work."* (Angus, age 23)

Housing is perhaps the key factor that underlies many of the other determinants of employability. Inadequate housing is correlated with poor health (increased sickness and injury) lack of safety (increased risk of physical and sexual assault), poor nutrition, continual loss/theft of personal belongings and inadequate rest / sleep. Perhaps most significantly, lack of stable housing forces individuals to focus on meeting short-term, immediate needs ("where am I going to sleep tonight?", "what am I going to eat?").

5.4 Education

Education is, of course, an established predictor of employability. As mentioned above, a recent labour market survey shows that the unemployment rate for young people in Toronto is 14.7%. However, what needs to be stated is that unemployment rates differ greatly for young people, based on education level. For instance, the unemployment rate for young people who graduated from college or university was 7.5%, whereas the rate for high school graduates was more than double that (16.3%) and the rate for those who had not completed high school was more than triple (23.4%)[25].

As might be expected, our street youth sample as a whole does not demonstrate a high level of educational attainment. In Table 16, we can see that well over half the sample does not have a grade 12 education.

Table-12
Educational Levels of Street Youth

	< Grade 8	Grades 9-11	Grades 12	Tech / College	University
Males	4%	52%	31%	9%	3%
Females	6%	54%	33%	4%	2%

One of the more common characteristics of street involved youth is clearly an early exit from the education system. While this phenomenon is partly due to family breakdown and the absence of parental support at an early age, frequently these youth displayed behaviour or emotional problems that undermined their ability to adjust successfully to the expectations of school. Participants were asked if they had ever met with a guidance counselor or doctor due to learning difficulties or emotional problems. A reasonably high 46.9% of the sample population

responded that they had in fact had such counseling, whereas 47.9% had not. Of those who had had some kind of intervention in school, 25.6% reported that they had been diagnosed as having anger management problems, 19.1% were diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder, 15.2% were diagnosed as being hyperactive, and 4.5% as having dyslexia. There were, then, clear indicators that many of our street youth sample were having difficulties that came to the attention of school authorities.

> *"I've got Grade 11. I've been in and out of school several times. I've been kicked out of most schools that I attended. But I managed to settle down long enough to do a semester at a time. I miss it now that I'm out of school."*
>
> (Janine, 22)

Education and Patterns of Making Money

Of course, there are some interesting differences in education level when one looks at patterns of making money. In Table-17, we can see that those involved in the sex trade, and those who panhandle / squeegee are the most likely to have dropped out of high school before graduating. This of course puts them at a much greater disadvantage in the labour market.

Table-17

Patterns of Making Money: Early School Leavers

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
Early high school leavers (percent)	57%	40%	52%	80%	60%	72%

Valuing Education

In spite of the clear difficulties street youth experienced at school, and the fact that many had to leave school at an early age, a large number of the street youth we sampled do indeed recognize the value of education (67% report that education is necessary for getting a decent job) and a strong desire to return to school. In fact, 76% report that they would like to go back to school. The street youth sample identify the following as the main barriers that they face in returning to school include a reliable income (99%), and stable housing (98%).

> *"I really want to go back and get my high school diploma. I want to be the one who shows everybody, 'yeah, I finished it'. Make them proud of me, that was always the thing. ... When I was at home and I brought home an A+, it was always, 'why didn't you get an A+++."*
>
> (Seamus, 24)

Our results are consistent with other research that indicates in spite of current dire straits, street youth often have a positive outlook about the future. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that most homeless youth have left school at an early age, due to the failure of our school system to meet the needs of young people from troubled homes.

Impact on employability: Evidence in Canada and elsewhere demonstrates again and again that early school leavers face a much tougher time getting and keeping jobs, and that they tend to be permanently relegated to low-paying service sector jobs with little opportunity of moving out of

this job ghetto. In the broader Canadian context, while there is in fact evidence that the economic recovery of the 1990s has created more opportunities for those with post-secondary degrees, there has in fact been a rise in unemployment for those with less than a grade 12 education.

Because many street youth are early school leavers, they are much less competitive in the employment market - and this is particularly so for those whose primary means of making money is the sex trade or panhandling/squeegeeing. From a preventive perspective, our information also suggests that cutbacks to support services in schools (counseling, for example) will lower the possibility of early diagnosis and intervention for children who are experiencing problems and are at risk of becoming street involved. Finally, the fact that Graduate Equivalency Diploma programs now often cost money (they used to be free) presents a barrier for street youth and other low income people for completing high school.

5.5 Health and Well being

Health maintenance is difficult for street youth. The inherent instability of their lifestyle encourages young people to focus on the immediate (securing food and shelter, for instance), and to give lower priority to the long term consequences of their behaviours. As a result, issues such as adequate nutrition, normal sleeping patterns, proper personal hygiene and regular visits to a doctor are all compromised to some extent by street involvement. They are also more likely to be victims of violent crime[26].

A wide body of literature documents the degree to which street youth are also vulnerable to debilitating diseases, including hepatitis B infection[27], HIV / AIDS[28] and other sexually transmitted diseases[29]. Street youth also typically have a level of dental and periodontal disease[30]. Many walk around in constant pain. Shout Clinic, a community health centre for street youth in downtown Toronto, reports that the most common health issues are upper respiratory tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases, skin infections, issues connected to substance use, trauma, and issues related to sexual health and pregnancy. However, much of the time at Shout is also spent dealing with mental health issues (including depression), making referrals and in trying to access shelter, legal help and employment opportunities for young people, as these are all factors that impact on health and well being.

Because being in a reasonably good state of health is a necessary precondition for finding and maintaining employment, youth participants were asked to respond to several questions regarding their health since they had become street involved. Survey participants were asked to rate their health over the past few months on a continuum from very healthy to unhealthy. 35.1% rated themselves as healthy, and 20.8% rated themselves as unhealthy or very unhealthy.

Factors which impact on health such as the frequency with which they had gone without food or shelter, felt unsafe, had no money, and had been able to access a shower or clean clothes were also investigated. In terms of nourishment, results of the data indicate that 39.3% of respondents

had never gone without food for a day in the past month. However, 42.6% had gone without food at least one day a week, and 20% of these had gone hungry several days a week. This information is consistent with other research on street youth and nutrition, which characterizes them as being malnourished; that is, they suffer from involuntary hunger or food deprivation. A recent study on street youth and nutrition makes the point that two thirds were experiencing getting enough food, 18% were below average weight and almost half reported "some hunger and/or absolute food deprivation over the past 30 days". [31]

When asked how often they had no place to sleep, while 57% responded "never", 22.2% indicated they had faced this situation "at least once a week". 46.2% of the participants indicated that they never felt unsafe, however, 34.9% felt unsafe at least once a week with almost 10% stating they felt this way daily. When asked how often they had no money in their pocket, only 15.5% replied never, whereas 20.4% replied every day. A further 54.1% said they had no money one or more days per week. 45.7% of the sample population were able to bath or shower every day whereas 29.4% were able to do so about once a month or less. 39.4% of participants were able to put on clean clothes daily in contrast to 19.7% who indicated they never had clean clothes. It is likely that those street youth in our sample who were staying in shelters were more able to take care of basic needs, including shelter, food, showers, laundry facilities, etc.

Health and Well being, and Patterns of Making Money

It is clear, then, that street involvement impacts negatively on health, and that this affects employability. If we examine the perception of street youth in terms of how their health has been affected since they wound up on the streets, we find some interesting results. While overall, 37.3% indicated that their health had remained the same, only 14.6% indicated it had improved, while 47.6% felt that their health had worsened. If we look at this information in terms of the different patterns of making money, some clear differences emerge.

Table-18

Has their health improved since they have been on the streets?

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
Better	15%	11%	9%	27%	10%	10%
Same	36%	40%	40%	33%	34%	32%
Worse	51%	51%	51%	40%	66%	68%

Those who are involved in panhandling and squeegeeing, and those involved in crime, are most likely to report that their health has gotten worse since they have been on the streets, while those involved in the sex trade are most likely to report some improvement in health. It is important to remember that those involved in the sex trade came from the most difficult family backgrounds, and that this may account for the perception of improvement..

Impact on employability: Initial indications from this data, such as 20.8% describing themselves as unhealthy, or 47.6% reporting that their health had gotten worse since being on the street, would support the conclusion that a street involved lifestyle impacts negatively on the

overall state of health. Similarly, problems encountered by a significant portion of the sample in providing basic needs such as food, shelter, personal hygiene, safety and monetary income, will likely predispose these youth to ongoing risks to their physical and mental health.

This data indicates that poor health acts as a significant barrier to finding and maintaining employment. It also undermines youth in their efforts to make the preliminary first steps towards entering the domain of formal employment. Street youth are prone to a higher incidence of illness and injury, and because of their overall poor health there is a consequent longer recovery time. Lack of proper nutrition and sleep affects their ability to work for long periods of time. It also means that, in terms of presentation of self, street youth look more haggard. In addition, the low self esteem that is exacerbated by life on the streets invariably impairs their ability to seek employment, make a strong presentation during a job interview, and maintain a job.

5.6 Mental Health

Many previous studies of homeless populations have identified that individuals experiencing mental health problems are highly represented[32] Dennis, et al, assert that "there is now a general consensus that approximately one third of the single, adult homeless population have a severe mental illness"[33] . Severe mental illness is defined as a serious and persistent mental or emotional disorder (e.g. schizophrenia, mood disorders, schizo-affective disorders) that disrupts functional capacities for primary aspects of daily life such as self-care, interpersonal relationships, and employment or school[34].

> *"I saw psychiatrists around the age of twelve. I don't know if I was depressed or angry. I think it was both. I was hospitalized and one time they kept me for about five months. They pretty much experimented with a lot of medications on me. The drugs were kind of fun, you know, to see what kind of freaky reaction I'd have."* (Brenda, 19)

For the street youth population mental health issues such as low self-esteem and depression are clearly significant, as are more severe mental health issues. For many people, the teen years are a difficult period characterized by self-doubt and low self-esteem. Street youth are particularly vulnerable in this way; the precursors to homelessness (physical, sexual abuse) lead to a diminishing of self-worth, and the constant barrage of abuse while one is living on the streets (from passers by, the police, other young people) only increases this. One clear result is that street youth are much more likely to exhibit suicidal behaviour. A study by the Addiction Research Foundation, for instance, showed that 43% of street youth (37% of males and 61% of females) attempted **suicide** at some point in their lifetime.

Depression and Patterns of Making Money

Table-19 demonstrates the degree to which depression is an issue for the street youth sample,

and then relates it to patterns of making money. Overall, more than 46% report being depressed more than once a week, with those involved in the sex trade reporting the highest levels of depression (followed by those on social assistance), and those who have regular jobs being the least depressed. Whether the type of work produces depression, or is an outcome of mental health, remains to be answered.

Table-19

How often have respondents been depressed in the last few weeks

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
<once Wk.	54%	77%	40%	25%	61%	52%
>once Wk.	46%	23%	60%	75%	39%	48%

Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders

The results of our survey also indicate the degree to which more serious mental health issues are prominent with the street youth population. We asked participants whether they had ever met with a doctor or counselor (outside of school) because of a mental health problem. In response to this question, 38.1% said yes, 52.6% said no, and 9.3% did not answer the question. Those who had some type of mental health intervention were asked what type of diagnosis they received. A reasonably high 26.4% of the sample reported a diagnosis of depression, 7.6% of schizophrenia, 9% of bipolar affective disorder, and 6.5% of personality disorder. These rates of incidence exceed prevalence rates in the general population which are 9% for women and 3% for men (depression), 1% (schizophrenia) and 1.6% (bipolar affective disorder)[35]. Prevalence rates of personality disorder are more varied due to the various types of disorders, however most fall in the range of between 1 and 2% of the population.

The implications of this data are interesting. For example, some psychiatric disorders tend to be persistent and impair life management skills profoundly, e.g., schizophrenia, bi-polar affective disorder. In addition, given that the mean age of our sample was 21.5, and the general age of onset of such disorders is the late teens or early adulthood, there is the possibility that some youth have not yet been diagnosed or received intervention from mental health professionals. Consequently, the actual numbers of youth suffering from these serious psychiatric disorders may in fact be higher than was revealed in our sample. Youth with these disorders are at even greater risk than street youth in general, and will quite possibly require support from mental health professionals and social service providers throughout their life span.

Impact on employability:

Needless to say, the symptoms of these disorders impair functioning to the point that the prospects of achieving gainful employment are in fact very limited. Without adequate psychiatric treatment and social supports, these youth are highly susceptible to becoming part of the adult homeless population.

The high rates of depression amongst street youth also act as a barrier to finding and keeping a job. Depressed individuals often lack the self confidence, energy, organization and perseverence

necessary to find a job. If they are working they often have problems with absenteeism, punctuality or interacting with peers. The high rate of job turnover revealed in our sample may be partly attributable to the high rate of depression.

5.7 Social Capital

The concept of having an effective and responsive support system is addressed in the theory of social capital. When we speak of social capital, we are referring to the value of relations; that is, those resources (knowledge, abilities, connections, etc) that family, friends, and others can bring to bear on one's life chances. The key value of social capital theory is that it allows us to understand the different human resources that people draw on, and the degree to which some individuals and groups are impoverished in this regard.

> "Social capital theory assumes that people acquire at birth and accumulate through their lives unequal shares of 'capital' that have an impact on their life chances. It focuses on the ways that individuals succeed and fail in socially organizing their efforts to attain cultural goals"[36]

Young people growing up are traditionally able to rely on a broad range of social supports to help them move into adulthood. These supports begin with the family - which may include parent(s), siblings or an extended family. Other important supports include friends, neighbours, friends of the family, and school teachers and counselors. These relations and attachments ideally provide support in the form of love, guidance, support, encouragement and models of adult behaviour. In the best case scenario, these supports young people learn the skills for day-to-day living, and are able to nurture dreams of adult life that include notions of family and occupation. These supports also are key in helping many youth find and maintain work.

In reviewing our data, it becomes clear that the vast majority of street youth are impoverished in regard to social capital. The high rate of family breakdown, dysfunction and abuse indicates that the primary unit of support has been withdrawn from the lives of street youth. When street youth leave home, the connections with extended family, school and communities of origin also are weakened.

For street youth, then, their range of social supports are weak to begin with. Once on the streets, their network of social supports more or less collapses. Their social capital is diminished to the point that they come to rely more and more on their circle of street youth friends, who also characteristically lack social capital. Their key supports are each other, and because of this they will often choose to stay together at all costs (and avoid shelters, for instance) rather than risk their fragile system of social supports. This tight network is often described by street youth as their "street family".

Yet, our data suggests that it is questionable that such "street families" provide the tight relationships that many street youth imply or imagine. As can be seen in Table-20, to get a sense

of the quality of friendships that street youth have, a number of statements were posed to which street youth responded in terms of how much they felt the statement reflected their views.

Table-20
Attitudes towards friendship

	Not at all like me	Somewhat like me	Much like me	Very much like me
I feel very close to my friends (n=328)	15.9%	33.8%	25.3%	24.4%
Friends always take time to talk over my problems (n=322)	24.2%	29.8%	24.5%	21.4%
Friends let me know I'm worthwhile (n=325)	17.2%	25.5%	29.2%	28%
No matter what my friends will always be there (n=319)	21.0%	25.4%	24.1%	28.8%
I totally trust my friends (n=324)	24.1%	27.2%	22.8%	25.9%

It is interesting to note that the responses fall quite close to 50% who agree with the statements, and 50% who do not. That is, half of the respondents feel they enjoy a good level of mutual trust and support with their friends, but the other half are less satisfied with the quality of these relationships. Initial conclusions are that about half of the street youth sample seem able to make some attachments with their peers, although the nature of these relationships might not be too helpful as stepping stones toward formal employment. The fact that about half the sample did not feel to attached to their friends indicates that many street youth feel quite isolated and that the camaraderie of the street scene is not quite akin to a surrogate family. In the qualitative interviews, several youth acknowledged there was some support on the street from peers, but that just as often these relationships would lead to betrayals and exploitation.

> *"I don't have tolerance for people, I can't deal with other people. I've been alone my whole life and I've come to value that on some level. I basically don't trust anybody, but I don't think that's an irrational thing for me ... I mean, I have reason not to"*
> (Gary, 18)

Impact on employability: The social support network of homeless youth is geared to keeping them alive and potentially safe in the short term. It is not necessarily useful in preparing them for a job search, in using the "connections" that so many young people rely on to get work, in preparing a resume or for an interview. The "street family" also doesn't provide the supports necessary to maintain and keep a job.

> *"When you're on the street you end up hanging out with other kids on the street. If you're lucky enough to get a job you're still caught up in the life, all your friends are hanging out*

- eventually you get sucked back into the street scene."
(Bob, age 22)

5.8 Substance Use

As we have argued, street involved youth are clearly vulnerable to a range of health and social problems. One manifestation of this is the use of substances at a higher rate than young people living at home. In Table-21, we see that cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana are by far the most prevalent substances used by street youth. These figures are in fact consistent with other research on street youth and drug use.

Table-21
Substances used by street youth in the previous month

	Never	<once a month	once or twice a month	once a week	Several times a week	Daily
Cigarettes (n=325)	12%	4%	0	2%	3%	79%
Alcohol (n=331)	18%	20%	20%	17%	12%	13%
Marijuana or Hash (n=322)	27%	7%	7%	9%	18%	31%
Crack (n=323)	81%	7%	5%	1%	2%	3%
Powdered cocaine (n=327)	75%	12%	6%	3%	2%	2%
Speed/ Crystal(n=322)	78%	8%	6%	3%	3%	2%
Acid (LSD) (n=324)	73%	14%	7%	3%	1%	2%
Heroin (n=326)	84%	6%	4%	2%	2%	3%
Glue or gasoline (n=323)	92%	3%	1%	2%	1%	2%
Ecstacy (n=326)	72%	14%	7%	3%	3%	2%
Steroids (n=322)	95%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Growth Hormones (n=321)	96%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Pharmaceuticals (n=325)	77%	6%	5%	4%	3%	6%

The reasons for the use of substances at this level are connected to several factors. First, because of the inherent instability in their lives, street youth tend to focus more on the immediate, and therefore they are more prone to risk-taking behaviour. Secondly, because they are young, this tendency towards risk-taking (especially males) is greater. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the rigors of life on the streets lead many young people to self-medicate. That is, having to deal with depression, unresolved issues from their past, and in many cases, emerging mental illness, leads many to seek the use of substances as an escape. For others, it is in fact their struggle to survive - and their way of making money - that leads to the need to self-medicate.

"(Prostitution is) incredibly degrading - I became a serious alcoholic and drug addict because of it. Because it was so degrading it was my only way of dealing with it and that's why I don't do it anymore, both jobs stripping and escorting. I was always incredibly high or incredibly drunk or both and ended up in the detox. I wouldn't do it again, it was a bad time in my life and I didn't care about myself or anybody else. I figured I was going to end up dead."

(Monica, 21)

Impact on Employment

At one level, the use of substances by street youth should not be surprising given the degree to which people in our society generally use substances to deal with day-to-day stressors. Substance use, of course, becomes a problem for anyone when it impairs their ability to carry out daily tasks, maintain relationships and, in this case, obtain and retain a job. A significant percentage of our sample report, for instance, daily usage of alcohol (13%) and marijuana (31%). A small percentage use crack (3%), cocaine (2%) and heroin (3%) every day. If we use daily usage of a substance (except cigarettes) as an indicator of problematic substance use, and try to identify how this is correlated with patterns of making money, we learn the following:

Table-22

Daily use of substances by pattern of making money

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
Take Drugs on Daily Basis*	38%	26%	18%	45%	59%	57%

* This measure includes: alcohol and/or marijuana and/or Crack and /or Powdered Cocaine and/or LSD and/or Heroin consumed on a daily basis.

Those on social assistance are in fact the least likely to have a substance use problem, while those who panhandle / squeegee, and those involved in criminal activities are most likely to.

"It' so hard for people to be street involved and not do drugs. I mean look at the reality of it. It comes to the point where people do drugs to deal with the pain of their daily lives, and it hits the point where people are doing the drugs to avoid the pain of not doing the drugs."

(Melanie, 23)

5.9 Determinants of Employability and Patterns of Making Money

In a previous section, we identified a relationship between the background characteristics of street youth and patterns of making money. In this section we have focused on examining the determinants of employability. Here, it is also clear that when we categorize street youth in

terms of various survival strategies, there are some significant differences, which are summarized below in Table-23.

Table-23

Main Activity of Making Money by Current Situations of Street Involved Youth

	Total Sample	Paid Emp. (jobs)	Social Ass.	Sex Trade	Crime	Panhandle / squeegee
Housing: Shelter Own place On the Street	60% 25% 15%	75% 23% 2%	58% 52% 0%	58% 35% 6%	80% 11% 9%	47% 23% 30%
Early high school leavers (percent)	57%	40%	52%	80%	60%	72%
Without food at least once a week	42%	42%	34%	60%	23%	23%
Financial Situation: Enough to get by Usually short	 40% 60%	 49% 51%	 13% 87%	 45% 55%	 47% 53%	 42% 58%
Health since on Street - Better - Same - Worse	 15% 36% 51%	 11% 40% 51%	 9% 40% 51%	 27% 33% 40%	 10% 34% 66%	 10% 32% 68%
Have CV prepared	62%	91%	80%	53%	74%	49%
Take Drugs on Daily Basis*	38%	26%	18%	45%	59%	57%
How often depressed in last few weeks? <once Wk. >once Wk.	 54% 46%	 77% 23%	 40% 60%	 25% 75%	 61% 39%	 52% 48%

Throughout this section on Determinants of Employability, we have attempted to correlate the experiences that our sample of street youth are currently facing as displayed with their main economic activity. When we bring together this information in one table, some interesting results are revealed about the different patterns of making money.

Category 1: Paid Employment Youth whose main source of income was generated through paid employment are:

- housed, for the most part, in shelters
- more likely to report that they have enough money to get by
- less often report being depressed, compared to the group as a whole

- more likely to have a resume prepared
- less likely to use drugs on a daily basis
- most likely to have completed high school

Category 2: Social Assistance Examining the data relating to those who are most dependent upon social assistance, these youth are:

- the most likely to report that they have a place of their own
- the most likely to report that they do not have enough money to get by
- the least likely to be using drugs on a daily basis
- over 2/3 have a prepared resume
- the majority report feeling depressed more than once a week

Category 3: Sex Trade The current situations of the group who reported that working in the sex trade was where most of their income was generated from, can be described as:

- reported being without food more often than youth from other groups
- interestingly, more youth from this category than those from any other group reported that their health had actually improved since they last lived at home.
- nevertheless, their self-reported experiences of depression were by far the greatest for all youth surveyed.
- least likely to have completed high school
- amongst the least likely to have a resume prepared

Category 4: Crime The criminal group is found to stand out on three measures:

- most likely to be living in shelter
- the least likely to report that they went with out food for a day
- the most likely to use drugs on a daily basis

Category 5: Panhandling / Squeegeeing Finally, the largest group in our sample, those who rely upon panhandling or squeegee cleaning for economic survival, were most likely to be:

- living “on the street” (squats, parks, alley ways, under bridges etc).
- self reported that their health was the worst, compared the group on the whole
- the least likely to go without food.
- the least likely to have a resume prepared
- amongst least likely to have completed high school

VI) Conclusions

> *"People think there's so much freedom on the streets, but there isn't that much freedom. You're very limited"* (Nancy, 22)

If our goal is to help homeless youth move in the direction of employment - and a life off the streets - we must begin by recognizing that there are no quick fixes. We need to come to a deeper understanding of how such young people wind up on the streets in the first place and what keeps them there. From a policy and program level, interventions which address the determinants of employability are more likely to have a greater positive and long term impact than will law enforcement strategies, admonitions to 'get a job', or mainstream employment training programs.

Childhood background The most successful interventions should also encompass prevention, and tackle the root causes of youth homelessness. It is our position that before these young people even hit the streets, they are operating with a number of deficits that would, in the long run, affect their employability whether they remained in their household or not. The very high percentage who came through foster care or group homes (43%) coupled with the high rate of physical, emotional and sexual abuse suggests that for many, their ability to establish strong attachments at an early age is severely impaired, and as a result, achieving their educational and vocational goals becomes highly problematic.

Once in school, other signs of difficulties and stress appear. Many young people in our sample reported that when in school, they had difficulty adjusting, and they were identified by school officials as having anger management problems, learning disabilities and ADD. Early warning signs, then, were present within the school system. It is clear from this that it is worth ensuring that our schools place a high priority on assessments and early interventions for those who display signs of problems adjusting to school.

Adolescence It is during the ages of 16 to 24 that individuals ideally make the transition from the dependencies of childhood to becoming independent adults. It is one of the most challenging and difficult developmental phases of our lives. It is during this period of time that youth begin to define a sense of self identity and start to separate from care givers, make decisions and choices regarding their educational and vocational goals, develop their sexual orientation and begin to have intimate relationships, try to establish a network of supportive social relationships outside the home and begin to acquire a variety of life management skills that will allow them to successfully move towards independence. In addition, youth face a great deal of peer pressure and are often bombarded by unrealistic social expectations in the media.

The degree of success an adolescent has in meeting these challenges between the ages of 16 - 24, frequently dictates their socio-economic destiny and determines whether their psycho-social adaptation to the environment is successful. It is our position that the absence of financial and emotional supports that are present in most homes places street involved youth at an extreme

disadvantage in achieving educational and vocational roles.

As the parents of any teenager or young adult can attest, successfully making the transition to independent living is a difficult task even for youth that come from homes that are nurturing and supportive. In the general population parents and extended family provide at least some support and direction as their children confront difficult choices and decisions. For the large population of street involved youth, however, they face the same difficult transitions as youth in general but without the financial and emotional supports of an involved care giver. The absence of a support system at one of the most pivotal points in one's life, affects the employability of street youth very significantly.

Life on the Streets If, as Hagan and McCarthy argue, employment represents a pathway off the streets, then we must recognize that this path is not straight forward, but rather, is fraught with many unanticipated twists and turns, and a successful journey is dependent on a series of other supports being in place. We must also recognize that street youth are not all the same; that the term itself implies a homogeneity of background and experience that does not in fact exist. Who we call street youth, homeless youth or street involved youth includes a diverse population in terms of place of origin, class background, ethno-racial background, sexual orientation, etc. What unites them is their difficult past, their current poverty and their desire to move forward with their lives. Factors we regard as the determinants of employability affect - and unfortunately, in many cases impair - their ability to get back to school, get a job and generally, move back into the economic mainstream.

Patterns of Making Money One manifestation of the diversity of street youth - and a useful means of analyzing their employability - is the fact that they tend to cluster around certain patterns of making money. What is of significance here is that there are in fact important differences between the categories defined by these economic activities. These differences are manifest both in terms of the background characteristics of youth who identify with them, AND in terms of factors and variables that define their current life situation.

For instance, it is clear that those homeless youth who are most successful in finding ***paid employment*** and who define their identity in this way, are significantly different from other homeless youth. They are, for instance, much more likely to have completed high school, to have strong work readiness skills, to be housed in shelters. They are also less likely to be depressed and to be involved with drugs. Interestingly, they are also most likely to have grown up OUTSIDE of Toronto. One can conclude from most of these variables, that this category of youth will have distinct advantages in terms of Determinants of Employability, and it is not surprising that they are more likely to be employed.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who are involved in the sex trade, or in panhandling / squeegeeing. Those in the ***sex trade*** clearly come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, where there are higher rates of sexual and physical abuse. As a result, they left home earlier than most other street youth, and perhaps as a consequence, are least likely to have completed high

school. Their work readiness skills are underdeveloped, and their self-reported experiences of depression were by far the greatest for all youth surveyed.

Those involved in ***panhandling / squeegeeing*** are the least likely to have secure housing, and their self-reported health is the worst. They, like those in the sex trade, have low job-readiness, and are amongst the least likely to have completed high school. Those on ***social assistance*** are most likely to have secure housing and, contrary to some popular beliefs, are least likely to have problems with drugs. They are unfortunately very likely to be depressed, and report they do not have enough money - this latter factor is likely due to the fact that once they are housed, they must spend a much greater percentage of their income on housing. Those who report ***crime*** as their main way of making money are most likely to be living in shelters, are most likely to be from Toronto, and most likely to use drugs on a daily basis (this may explain the fact that 'drug dealing is a major source of income).

Overall, then, it is clear that there are significant differences between homeless youth when one examines them in terms of patterns of making money. The explanation for the fact that some street youth are more likely to be employed than others should not be reduced to their greater 'motivation'. Clearly, the fact that many face incredible barriers in finding work, and more importantly, in maintaining employment, raises some serious questions about our assumptions about the role of employment as a catalyst for leaving the streets. It should also make us question the wisdom of the belief that if we contain opportunities to engage in certain economic activities (panhandling, squeegeeing, for instance) that young people will automatically move into paid employment. Our key theme in this report is that successful strategies to move young people off the streets cannot rest simply on employment as a solution. This is because employability is in turn dependent on a series of other variables, most of which are beyond the control of the individual in question.

Street youth compete in a labour market where they are at a severe disadvantage, even when competing for the most basic minimum wage jobs. Their social capital is weak - they lack connections to ease their way into the world of work and their social supports are inadequate to prepare them for the task of moving forward. The large percentage who failed to complete high school face a difficult task in finding work in Toronto, where we know that those without a high school education are many more times likely to be unemployed than those with a university education. Those with diagnosed mental illnesses are unlikely to obtain and maintain employment, and for them, the future must be particularly frightening. The fact that street youth are poorly nourished, and tend to be more susceptible to illness, injury and trauma than other young people, weakens their ability to work. In addition, the fact that a percentage are dealing with substance abuse issues will complicate their ability to work, just as alcoholism and other forms of drug addiction do with the rest of the population.

Perhaps the key determinant of employability - the one that underpins many of the rest - is housing. A lack of housing makes the search for work difficult - no address to put on an application (the address of a shelter is not likely to impress most employers), no phone to receive calls for interviews, no place to rest and prepare for interviews. A lack of housing - or

inadequate housing - of course makes maintaining employment extremely tenuous as well. Without a place to come home to that is safe; without a place to clean up, to eat, rest and relax, to regenerate for the next day, no one can be expected to maintain employment long. A home is a central piece of the employment equation.

Employment training represents one step on the road to jobs for street youth. Clearly, because 40% lack basic work readiness skills, this is a key factor. However, employment training on its own is not sufficient. The most successful approaches are tailor made for street youth by also ensuring that other determinants of employability are addressed - housing, health care, education, etc. Because of the complexity of these young lives, their diverse backgrounds, and disparate issues they face once on the streets, there are not and cannot be simple solutions, or direct routes off the streets. As a group, homeless youth have wound up on the streets for different reasons, and they will get off the streets for different reasons. Unfortunately, because of the complexity of their issues, the path off the streets will consist of many small steps, some forward and some backward. With sufficient supports, and opportunities for stabilization, there is a greater chance that they will have opportunities that other young people can count on, and that they will be able to lead satisfactory lives on their own terms.

VII) Recommendations

In concluding this report, we are making the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:
That the federal, provincial and municipal governments make housing a priority, and restore funding for an investment in low income housing.

Recommendation 2:
That the federal, provincial and municipal governments work collaboratively to develop long term housing solutions for street involved youth and homeless adults, including supportive housing.

Recommendation 3:
That funding for employment training programs targeting street involved youth be expanded.

Recommendation 4:
That attempts to use policing, the criminal code and the justice system to 'control' the economic activities of homeless youth be suspended.

Recommendation 5:
That new opportunities be created for street involved youth to return to school while earning an income.

Recommendation 6:
That funding be restored for adult education, graduate equivalency diploma programs and colleges, so that street youth and other homeless adults can improve their education, and thus, their employability.

Recommendation 7:
That "harm reduction" strategies be the basis for working with young people with substance abuse problems, and that opportunities for treatment and methadone therapy be expanded.

Recommendation 8:
That publicly funded schools in Ontario be given the necessary resources to more effectively identify those youth who are at risk of becoming street involved and then provide early interventions that assist the youth and family to cope.

Recommendation 9:
That Community Action Treatment teams be established that target street involved youth who have psychiatric disorders.

Recommendation 10:

That social assistance be set at levels which enable people to obtain adequate housing and to be able to afford other basic necessities such as food and transportation.

ENDNOTES

1 "Market Analysis of Employment Needs and Services for Youth in Metro Toronto" HRDC, January 1997

2 Daly, Gerald. 1996. Homeless: Policies, Strategies, and Lives on the Street. New York: Routledge, p. 24

3 "Surviving the Streets" Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (1998)

4 Weber, M. (1991) Street Kids The Tragedy of Canada's Runaways U of T Press, Toronto; Hagan, J., & McCarthy, B. (1997) Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness Cambridge University Press

5 Read, S., DeMatteo, D., Bock, B., et al., (1993) HIV Prevalence in Toronto Street Youths The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto.; Hagan, J., & McCarthy, B. (1997) Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness Cambridge University Press

6 Brien, C., Travers, R., Bell, L., (1994) No Safe Bed Toronto: Central Toronto Youth Services

7 Smart, R. (1993) Drifting and Doing Changes in Drug Use Among Toronto Street Youth Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation

8 Tepperman, L. & Rosenberg, M. (1991) Micro-Macro Toronto: Prentice Hall

9 Mental Illness and Pathways into Homelessness: Proceedings and Recommendations (1997) Toronto: Mental Health Policy Research Group (CMHA Ontario Division, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Ontario Mental Health Foundation)

10 Read, S., DeMatteo, D., Bock, B., et al., (1993) HIV Prevalence in Toronto Street Youths The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto.; Smart, R. (1993) Drifting and Doing Changes in Drug Use Among Toronto Street Youth Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation

11 Basrur, Dr. S.V. "No Fixed Address: Young Parents on the Street". Report to the Toronto Board of Health Toronto: Medical Officer of Health, July 10, 1998

12 As reported in Toronto. My City, Safe City City of Toronto Community Safety Task Force (1999)

13 ibid.

14 Handbook of Prevention and Treatment with Children and Adolescents Amerman and Herson

15 Weber, M. (1991) Street Kids The Tragedy of Canada's Runaways U of T Press, Toronto; Hagan, J., & McCarthy, B. (1997) Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness Cambridge University Press

16 Kral, et al. (1997) "Prevalence of sexual risk behaviour and substance use among runaway and homeless adolescents in San Francisco, Denver and New York City." Intl. Journal of STD and AIDS. 8(2):109-117, 1997 Feb.

17 Hagan, J., & McCarthy, B. (1997) Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness Cambridge University Press

[18] O'Grady, B., Bright, R., Cohen, E., (1998) Sub-Employment and Street Youth: An Analysis of the Impact of Squeegee Cleaning on Homeless Youth; Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (1998) Surviving the Streets Street Youth and Squeegeeing in Toronto

[19] O'Grady, B., Bright, R., Cohen, E., (1998) Sub-Employment and Street Youth: An Analysis of the Impact of Squeegee Cleaning on Homeless Youth

20 Statistics Canada Labour Market Survey (Aug. 1999)

21 This includes Job Corps, Toronto Youth Outreach and more recently "S.W.Y.M. the Squeegee Diversion Project"?

22 Taking Responsibility for Homelessness An action Plan for Toronto (1999)

23 ibid.

24 Springer, JH; Mars, JH &Dennison, M. (1998) A Profile of the Homeless Population Study for the Homelessness Action Task Force

25 Statistics Canada Labour Market Survey (Aug. 1999)

26 Janus, M., Archambault, FX., Brown, SW., Welsh, LA. (1995) Physical Abuse in Canadian runaway adolescents" Child Abuse and Neglect 1995: 19(4):433-47

27 Wang, EE., King, S., Goldberg, E., et al., (1991) "Hepatitis B and human immunodeficiency virus infection in street youth in Toronto, Canada" Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal 1991:10(2):130-33

28 Read, S., DeMatteo, D., Bock, B., et al., (1993) HIV Prevalence in Toronto Street Youths The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto

29 MacDonald, NE., Fischer, WA., Wells, GA., et al., "Canadian Street Youth: Correlates of sexual risk-taking activity" Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal 1994:13(8):690-97

30 Lee, J., Gaetz. S., Goettler, F. (1994) "The Oral Health of Toronto Street Youth" The Canadian Dental Association Journal 1994: June, Vol.60, no. 6:545-548

31 Antoniades, M. & Terasuk, V. (1997) "A Survey of Food Problems Experienced by Toronto Street Youth" Canadian Journal of Public Health

[32] Lowry, G., Lee, T., Ward, J. (1996) A Situational Analysis of Services to Concurrent Disorder Street Youth in Metropolitan Toronto; Mental Illness and Pathways into Homelessness: Proceedings and Recommendations (1997) Toronto: Mental Health Policy Research Group (CMHA Ontario Division, Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Ontario Mental Health Foundation)

[33] Dennis, D,; Buckner, J; Lipton, F.; Levine, I.; (1991) A decade of research and services for mentally ill persons: where do we stand?" American Psychologist 46, 11: 1129-1138

[34] Ibid.

[35] Diagnostic and Statistical Manual - 4 (1996) A.P.A.

[36] Hagan, J., & McCarthy, B. (1997) Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness Cambridge University Press