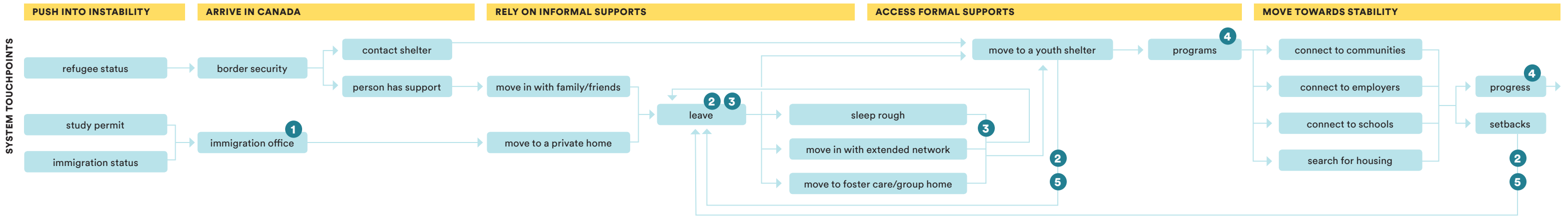


# Young person's journey into & out of housing precarity: New to Canada



SYSTEM TOUCHPOINTS

DECISION DRIVERS

YOUNG PERSON'S EXPERIENCES

GAPS

Situations that lead a young person to leave their country of birth include:

- + political instability
- + in-home conflict
- + lack of job opportunity
- + need for better education

Border security calls shelter intake for young person when:

- + they (or their family) do not have an informal support system
- + they know of a shelter they would like to go to

Young person does not rely on immigration officers when they:

- + have familial support
- + have friends they can go to
- + are finding their own private housing

Situations that lead a young person to either leave their housing or be kicked out or discharge include:

- + lack of physical, emotional or psychological safety
- + differences in values
- + financial stress
- + aging out of care
- + substance use

The loop of informal of housing precarity or hidden homelessness can be due to:

- + lack of knowledge of shelters and formal support systems
- + relying on familiar but unhealthy relationships

Factors that help motivate a young person at a shelter include:

- + building healthy and reliable relationships (with staff or other residents)
- + building connections with organizations/communities

A young person leaves their country of birth independently or with their family for any of the reasons listed above. This transition at times forces them to leave behind strong relationships and their social capital.

If the young person has access to a family member, friend, or an acquaintance who has had a similar experience, it helps them transition into their new living circumstances more easily. However, if this relationship doesn't exist, the young person is entirely reliant on themselves and the systems they interact with.

*"My friend, who is a refugee here, he stayed at [Eva's], so I said I want go to the same place as him too."*

When a young person arrives in Canada claiming asylum, it's likely that a lot of uncertainty precedes their first interaction with the Canadian system. The level of knowledge and empathy of an immigration officer, a case worker, or even a friend, can significantly impact their first experience and the trajectory of their journey.

Learning about formal support systems immediately upon arrival may also reduce their vulnerability and the likelihood of experiencing hidden homelessness or 'sleeping rough.'

*"Because I'm not from Canada, I didn't know about all these services Canada has to offer, because they don't offer that back in my country."*

If a young person arrives with family and an immigration status, there may be a decreased need for emergency housing support. While they still lack cultural and contextual familiarity, there is a safety net of their family finding housing and providing financial support.

*"When we came here, we were supposed to go to a shelter... but then my mom's family [said] come live with us. So I lived with my mom's family [of 10 people] for over 10 years."*

A young person begins their housing journey in an informal system if they have family, relatives, friends, or acquaintances who can provide support, or if they are unaware of youth shelters.

We heard many instances of young people experiencing a loop of housing precarity in such informal systems: staying at a relative's or a friend's home; forced to leave due to safety concerns or being kicked out; moving to 'sleeping rough'; moving back in with family/friends, and repeating the cycle.

*"From the embassy, we started calling for a shelter because obviously we wouldn't have a place to go... dad said to go with family friend [instead]... to be honest, I wish we didn't go. I regret staying one day there."*

Being new to Canada and having less social capital may additionally force a young person to rely on unsafe relationships to assist with their housing, which can perpetuate that loop.

*"Dad's friend's friend was angry at me... I don't know how to explain it... Everything has a price for these people. So for him paying for my schooling, he wanted something in exchange. When I couldn't deliver, the whole relationship broke off. So now I'm in a new country and I'm homeless."*

Once a young person finds their way to a shelter, their first experience can come as a culture shock. As they are experiencing an entirely new country, they may feel overwhelmed with the unfamiliar food, new rules and regulations, and other residents' behaviours. All of these factors compound and can impact a person emotionally and physically.

*"You don't feel comfortable living in shelter. People fight each other, always screaming."*

The young person might turn to service providers and educators for mentorship and emotional support, given that their network is being built. Counsellors, shelter staff and school teachers become the gateways into additional community groups who can provide support or relationships (e.g., LGBTQ communities, counselling services, skills-building or recreational classes, social events, etc).

*"I can talk to my [case]worker whenever I want. The workers are very friendly with us, we can ask whatever we want... [the staff] like supporting people. Like, they are family for you."*

A recently immigrated young person also relies on the staff at shelters to guide them through unfamiliar application processes. It is with their knowledge that they are able to connect to one another, apply for healthcare, search for jobs, and housing.

While shelter staff can offer support in the search for jobs or housing, a young person still faces the barrier of discrimination from landlords or employers, which impacts their outcome of finding stable housing.

*"...[landlords] don't take us when we're refugees or we live in a shelter... They don't even want to text us."*

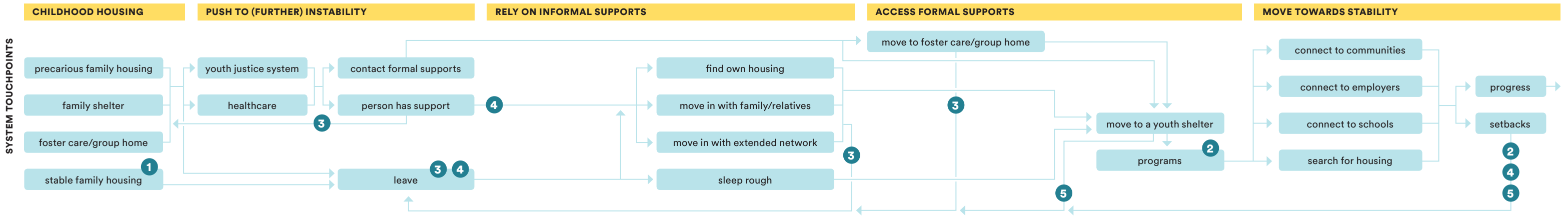
With a limited social network, young people may also face added vulnerability in the relationships they form, which can either propel them forward in their journey towards stability, or loop them back into housing precarity and financial instability.

*"As I have grown through shelters, I have gotten better everyday; physical health, mental health and being more aware."*

Connections and relationships are an integral part of a young person's journey towards stability. Many young people develop life skills and find social connections through shelter programming.

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Education &amp; awareness</b></p> <p>Limited awareness of the full spectrum of support available to young people, can result in them relying on a mix of resources for support or information and possibly entering a shelter that doesn't fully suit their needs.</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Personal/cultural disconnect</b></p> <p>Being immersed into a new culture and rediscovering one's identity is overwhelming. Without a social network to provide support, young people can experience isolation that impacts their mental and physical wellbeing.</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Housing precarity loop</b></p> <p>A limited social network combined with financial instability can lead to young people experiencing a loop of precarious housing, which without the stable, healthy connections, is incredibly difficult to pull out of.</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Connections</b></p> <p>Young people who have recently immigrated have a limited social network, which opens them to more vulnerability and risk, making it difficult to find an anchor that pulls them out of a precarity loop.</p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>Shelter customs</b></p> <p>Being unfamiliar with a shelter's customs can make the onboarding experiences difficult. If rules are unclear or new to a young person, they may be at risk of unintentionally behaving inappropriately or endangering someone else's emotional or physical safety.</p>
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# Young person's journey into & out of housing precarity: Born & raised in Canada



**DECISION DRIVERS**

- CHILDHOOD HOUSING:** Housing precarity may start in early childhood due to:
  - + poverty or financial stress
  - + intergenerational housing instability
  - + death of a guardian or a family member
  - + parents' divorce
  - + guardian's mental health
- PUSH TO (FURTHER) INSTABILITY:** Police or hospitals may call shelter intake for a young person when:
  - + they do not have informal support
  - + they are at risk if they go back to their housing or could put others at risk
- RELY ON INFORMAL SUPPORTS:** Situations that lead to departure include:
  - + lack of physical, emotional or psychological safety
  - + differences in values
  - + financial stress
  - + aging out of care
  - + substance use
- ACCESS FORMAL SUPPORTS:** The loop of informal of housing precarity or hidden homelessness can be due to:
  - + lack of knowledge of shelters and formal support systems
  - + choosing familiar but unhealthy relationships over shelters
- MOVE TOWARDS STABILITY:** Situations that lead a young person to leave a shelter include:
  - + lack of physical, emotional or psychological safety
  - + inappropriate fit
  - + culture shock

**FACTORS THAT HELP MOTIVATE A YOUNG PERSON AT A SHELTER INCLUDE:**

- + building healthy and reliable relationships (with staff or other residents)
- + building connections with organizations/communities of interest

**YOUNG PERSON'S EXPERIENCES**

- CHILDHOOD HOUSING:** When a young person has experienced housing precarity from early childhood, they have more awareness of shelter services, and have experienced independence at a very young age.
 

*"My grandma passed away...from 12 pretty much, I grew up taking care of myself. So [my mom] would come home, the house was already clean and she didn't have to worry about that."*

Whereas a young person from stable childhood housing might have less familiarity with social support systems.

*"I didn't know about shelters at all... when I ran away, my thought process was just, 'Ok, I have to get a job. I have to support myself and I have to get an apartment to live.'"*
- PUSH TO (FURTHER) INSTABILITY:** A young person experiencing emotional, psychological, or physical abuse might seek safety by making the decision to leave their home. The youth justice or healthcare systems may become involved, which can either further deteriorate relationships between the young person and their guardians or can make a young person aware of social services available to them.
 

*"I learned about the shelter system the first time when the cops brought me because when they said you have to leave, I [told them] I have nowhere to go."*

Another significant factor that triggers a young person's experience with housing precarity (or further pushes them into it) is financial stress, which strains familial relationships and can lead to isolating young people.

*"I dislocated my shoulder so I couldn't go to work for a certain amount of time and I was still on probation, so they fired me... I couldn't pay rent so I gave [my aunt] everything out of my savings, every cheque that I made went straight to her... so she eventually kicked me out."*
- RELY ON INFORMAL SUPPORTS:** A young person who is not directed to a shelter or has relatives, friends, or acquaintances who can provide support, may rely on their informal housing system for an extended period of time.
 

We heard many instances of young people experiencing a loop of housing precarity in such informal systems: staying at a relative's or a friend's home; forced to leave due to safety concerns or being kicked out; moving to 'sleeping rough'; moving back in with family/friends, and repeating the cycle.

*"I felt really uncomfortable. My dad kind of hurt me... and even though I told [my grandmother] this stuff about my dad... I don't think she believed me. So I was kind of just stuck there and I was really miserable. So I just ran away... there was this random girl from high school and she said I could stay with her when I told her I was leaving my dad's on Facebook."*

When unaware of social services, many young people connect to shelters and other support services haphazardly or by chance, through a wide variety of sources such as school teachers, relatives, acquaintances or even strangers.

*"I didn't know I was sleeping in front of an OW office, and so they came in the morning and saw me sleeping there. They woke me up and asked if I was ok... Went in, and that's when everything brought me to [Eva's Place]... they gave me some bus fare, but it wasn't enough so I had to walk for most of the way."*
- ACCESS FORMAL SUPPORTS:** Once a young person arrives at a shelter, they can experience a significant culture shock. New rules and regulations and other residents' behaviours can compound and impact them emotionally and physically. This might set them on high alert for their safety, or push them back into informal systems.
 

*"Even just walking into the shelters, like bro, I don't, I don't belong here. There's crack-heads walking everywhere."*

*"When I got there, I was shook. I had never been to a shelter. This was a whole new experience for me and the initial thought I had there was, 'someone is going to try to hurt me. I'm not going to enjoy this at all.'"*

They are also expected to follow a set of rules and expectations that can be a shift from their past experiences and might not fit their specific needs.

*"I don't agree with some of the rules here. I don't agree... like locking the washrooms at night. There's only one washroom throughout the day and then there's a whole line. The food was terrible at first, but it's getting a little better."*
- MOVE TOWARDS STABILITY:** The relationships that a young person forms and the communities that they connect to, as they move through the housing system are important drivers in moving towards long-term stability.
 

Counsellors and shelter staff often become the gateways into additional community groups who can provide support or relationships (e.g., LGBTQ communities, counselling services, skills-building or recreational classes, social events, etc). Shelter staff are also critical in helping a young person find a job, access stable housing, or connect with programs such as YSEP (Youth Succeeding in Employment Program).

**GAPS**

- 1 Education & awareness**  
Limited awareness of the full spectrum of support available to young people, can result in them relying on purely informal supports that lead to further instability and hidden homelessness for a significant period of time.
- 2 Unique services/treatment**  
Each young person experiences a unique and complex life journey, and their varying circumstances and needs require individualized approaches to care.
- 3 Housing precarity loop**  
Financial instability combined with a lack of awareness of social services can lead to young people experiencing a loop of precarious housing, which without the stable and healthy connections, is incredibly difficult to pull out of.
- 4 Connections**  
Young people may choose informal supports instead of the services of a shelter, as a way of maintaining ties to their network and choosing familiar options that appear safer and more trustworthy (whether or not that is the case).
- 5 Shelter customs**  
The perception of shelters and formal support systems may be that they are a last resort for a young person who is leaving their informal support network. This might make the uptake and transition process difficult.