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Submission to the Government Youth Caucus Priorities for Budget 2027 to Support Canadian Youth

**Submitted by 360°kids
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Preventing Crisis, Creating Opportunity

Young people across Canada are navigating growing pressures related to housing, employment, education, mental health, and the transition to adulthood. When instability emerges in one area, it can quickly affect others, putting a young person's housing, economic participation, and long-term well-being at risk.

Canada has an opportunity to intervene earlier. A prevention-focused approach that connects housing, employment, education, health, and community supports can help young people achieve stability before challenges escalate into crisis, while reducing longer-term pressures on emergency and social systems.

For 37 years, 360°kids, a leading youth-serving organization in York Region, has worked to prevent and end youth homelessness through prevention-focused, community-based solutions. Built around four interconnected pillars - Housing, Employment, Education, and Health and Well-being - 360°kids' integrated model helps young people avoid homelessness, strengthen support networks, and achieve long-term stability. This experience demonstrates what is possible when young people receive coordinated supports before crisis escalates.

Based on this experience, 360°kids recommends that the Government of Canada:

1. Establish a dedicated youth homelessness prevention stream within Reaching Home to support early intervention, housing stabilization, and proven prevention approaches.

2. Provide greater flexibility across federal youth employment programs to create equitable pathways to employment for young people.
3. Embed wraparound supports within federal youth programs and strengthen coordination across housing, employment, health, education, and social service systems.

Budget 2027 presents an opportunity to build on what is already working. By investing in prevention, creating more equitable pathways to employment, and supporting integrated service delivery, the federal government can support more young people achieve long-term stability, fully participate in the economy, and thrive in their communities.

Recommendation 1

Establish a dedicated youth homelessness prevention stream within Reaching Home to support early intervention, housing stabilization, and proven prevention approaches.

Every year, at least 35,000 young people in Canada experience homelessness, while many more experience hidden homelessness through couch surfing, temporary arrangements, or unsafe housing situations that often go uncounted.¹ For young people, the path to homelessness is often different from that of adults and is frequently driven by relational or systemic factors. Family conflict, poverty, mental health challenges, educational disruption, involvement with child welfare systems, human trafficking, and social isolation can all contribute to pathways into homelessness. Without early intervention, these experiences can have lasting consequences for housing stability, health, education, employment, and future well-being.²

Research from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada demonstrates that prevention-focused interventions improve outcomes for young people while reducing reliance on shelters and other crisis systems.³ Yet youth-focused prevention initiatives continue to compete with broader homelessness priorities for funding, making it difficult for communities to sustain interventions before a young person enters homelessness.

¹ A Way Home Canada, *Youth Homelessness in Canada*, accessed June 2025, <https://awayhome.ca/youth-homelessness/>.

² Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd, and Kaitlin Schwan, *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey* (Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2016), <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/WithoutAHome-final.pdf>.

³ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness* (Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2017), https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/YPRfullreport_2.pdf.

Prevention-focused approaches are already demonstrating results. Through 360°kids' Family and Natural Supports program, approximately 50% of participating youth were diverted from homelessness and remained safely housed with family or natural supports.⁴ Nightstop provides temporary accommodation to youth facing an immediate housing crisis while longer-term solutions are put in place, with 91% of participating youth remaining stably housed following intervention.⁵

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to strengthen Reaching Home by ensuring communities have dedicated resources to intervene earlier and sustain and scale prevention approaches, such as Nightstop, that are already demonstrating positive results.

Recommendation 2

Provide greater flexibility across federal youth employment programs to create equitable pathways to employment for young people.

Young people's ability to enter and remain in the workforce is critical to building a strong, inclusive Canadian economy, but not everyone has an equal opportunity to get there. Housing instability, financial insecurity, mental health challenges, or limited family support can make the costs and requirements associated with training and employment significant barriers to participation.

Federal youth employment programs provide important pathways into the workforce. However, differences in program design can result in inequitable access to the support young people need to succeed. Greater flexibility would allow community-based organizations to respond to individual needs through training stipends, transportation, work-related costs, and other practical supports that can determine whether a young person is able to participate.

360°kids sees the impact of these differences firsthand. Some programs allow young people to receive financial support while completing required classroom training, while others do not. For a young person without family or financial support, several weeks of unpaid training can put an otherwise promising employment opportunity out of reach. More flexible funding would allow service providers to meet young people where they are and provide the support needed to help youth, regardless of their background, achieve similar outcomes.

⁴ 360°kids, *Family and Natural Supports Program Outcomes and Impact Data* (Markham, ON: 360°kids, 2025), internal program statistics.

⁵ 360°kids, *Nightstop Program Outcomes and Impact Data* (Markham, ON: 360°kids, 2025), internal program statistics.

The economic case for getting this right is significant. Analysis of youth in Ontario who are not in employment, education, or training estimates an annual social and fiscal cost of more than \$26,000 per youth, contributing to an economic impact of more than \$8 billion each year.⁶ 360°kids' experience also demonstrates what is possible when employment opportunities are matched with appropriate supports: in 2024–25, 73% of youth participating in its employment programs either remained employed or successfully returned to school.⁷

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to make federal youth employment investments more flexible and equitable, ensuring young people, especially those experiencing significant barriers, have the support they need to access opportunities, remain engaged, and build pathways to sustained employment.

Recommendation 3

Embed wraparound supports within federal youth programs and strengthen coordination across housing, employment, health, education, and social service systems.

Youth homelessness and housing instability rarely result from a single issue. Many young people face overlapping challenges related to mental health, family conflict, education, poverty, unemployment, trafficking, and involvement with child welfare or justice systems. Stable outcomes are more likely when young people receive coordinated supports that address multiple aspects of their lives.⁸

The federal government has increasingly recognized this reality. YESS, for example, provides wraparound supports such as mentorship, transportation, and mental health counselling alongside employment and training. Budget 2027 should build on this approach by embedding wraparound supports more consistently across federal youth programs.

⁶ Blueprint. (2018, June). Towards a better understanding of NEET youth in Ontario: Findings from the "Made in Ontario" NEET youth research initiative. https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5f80fa46a156d5e9dc0750bc/5fd223a5e5a89c9087781f02_NEET-draft-DEC2020.pdf

⁷ 360°kids. *Annual Report 2024–25*. Markham, ON: 360°kids, 2025.

⁸ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness* (Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2017), https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/YPRfullreport_2.pdf.

Community-based organizations are well positioned to deliver these supports in ways that respond to the needs of young people. Federal funding should enable them to address barriers to participation and stability through housing stabilization, mental health services, transportation, family intervention, education and literacy supports, and connections to other services. 360°kids' experience demonstrates the value of this approach. In 2024–25, 76% of participating youth reported improved overall well-being, while 73% of youth participating in employment programs either remained employed or successfully returned to school.⁹

Strengthening coordination across Employment and Social Development Canada, Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, Health Canada, and other federal partners would further support this approach, ensuring investments work together to help young people achieve greater stability and long-term independence. By supporting youth-serving organizations delivering integrated services and encouraging collaboration across systems, the federal government can help address the root causes of instability rather than simply responding to its consequences.

Conclusion

The solutions needed to improve outcomes for young people already exist. Across Canada, communities are demonstrating that early intervention, integrated supports, homelessness prevention, and sustained pathways to employment can help young people achieve stability, build independence, and reach their full potential.

Investing before a crisis occurs is one of the most effective ways to improve long-term outcomes for young people. By strengthening youth homelessness prevention within Reaching Home, creating more equitable pathways to meaningful employment, and embedding wraparound supports across federal youth programs, the Government of Canada can help ensure more young people have the stability, skills, and opportunities they need to participate fully in their communities and the economy.

Through more than 37 years of experience, 360°kids has demonstrated what is possible when young people receive the right support at the right time. We stand ready to continue working with the Government of Canada and with the Government Youth Caucus to strengthen and scale proven solutions that help young people build stable, independent futures. Investing in their success is an investment in a stronger Canada, one where every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

⁹ 360°kids. *Annual Report 2024–25*. Markham, ON: 360°kids, 2025.