



## Successful Families: Developing a Model of Supportive Housing for Teen Families

### A REPORT TO EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA

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## Executive Summary

Without access to safe and affordable housing, teen families can become stuck in a cycle of poverty, with negative implications for healthy child development.

Disadvantage experienced prior to and after becoming a teen parent, such as social inequity, marginalization, discrimination, and adverse childhood experiences, is largely responsible for the negative social and economic outcomes experienced by teen parents relative to those who delay childbearing. Without addressing the factors that contribute to these negative outcomes, such as poverty and lack of affordable housing, interventions and programs will not succeed in contributing to lasting change in the lives of teen parents and their children.

The need to implement more comprehensive approaches to supporting teen families has become increasingly important due to widening social and economic disparities. Teen families face increasing challenges in a climate characterized by greater economic inequality and increased importance of education as a means of economic mobility. In addition to, and often compounded by, poverty and social disadvantage, teen parents experience a range of complex challenges unique to the experience of becoming a parent in adolescence. These challenges include the loss of natural supports, difficulty continuing with education, diminished opportunities for upward social mobility, and social stigma.

Teen parents are also particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness, a problem that has become more pronounced due to housing shortages across Edmonton and other Canadian cities. Challenges with securing appropriate housing are exacerbated by the stigma and concerns about financial risk that surround teen parenting, contributing to reluctance from many landlords to accept teen families as tenants. This has left a significant number of teens with few alternatives but to raise their children in unstable circumstances.

The provision of supportive housing has been identified as a key factor in supporting the success of teen families. Supportive housing is the provision of long-term, affordable, independent housing in combination with flexible, individualized, accessible supports (Rog et al., 2014). Despite the benefits of supportive housing, no model currently exists outlining the most effective ways to provide supportive housing for the specific needs of teen parents and their children.

The purpose of this project was to develop an effective program of supportive housing for teen families in Edmonton. Terra Centre for Teen Parents and Brentwood Community Development Group have partnered with the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) at the University of Alberta for the past four years to build knowledge to support the development of the supportive housing program. The resulting program, named Successful Families, has served 63 teen families since its inception.

### **THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

1. Develop and implement a supportive housing program for teen families, referred to as the Successful Families program; and
2. Examine the impacts of the program on teen families.



Research and evaluation were integrated throughout the project to aid the process of development and inform adaptations over time. A collaborative research process informed the project and was guided by the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR; Israel et al., 2003). To respond to the project objectives, a number of research and evaluation methods were used iteratively over four years to generate the information presented in this report. These methods included a literature review, participant observation during team meetings and onsite visits, staff interviews (individual and focus groups), photovoice with teen parents, self-report questionnaires and child development assessments, and program monitoring. The data generated through these methods was analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics and used to produce the three main sections presented in this document:

- **Framing the Issue: Supportive Housing for Teen Families**

This section presents the grey and academic literature reviewed relating to two main areas: 1) Teen Families, and 2) Housing and Homelessness. Each of these areas is further broken down into a number of sub categories that collectively describe why the provision of supportive housing is essential for teen families. Quotes from parents in the Successful Families program are integrated throughout to illustrate personalized experiences of the themes documented in the literature.

- **Responding to the Issue: The Successful Families Program**

This section provides a detailed overview of Successful Families as a program that responds to the need for supportive housing for teen families. Each area corresponds to a different level of the Successful Families model, starting with the families at the centre of the model, and working outwards through the various supportive structures that aim to ‘wraparound’ the families. As such, the program overview is divided into six themes: 1) Families, 2) Supports and Services, 3) Affordable, Safe and Secure Housing, 4) The Partnership, 5) Community Connections, and 6) Integrated Research and Evaluation.

- **Ongoing Challenges and Areas for Improvement**

This section outlines the ongoing challenges that are experienced with(in) the program and offers areas for further improvement in providing supportive housing for teen families. These challenges are categorized in terms of supports, participants, housing, staff, and research and evaluation.

Quotes and photos are embedded throughout the document to illustrate the program from the perspectives of Successful Families staff and participants.







## Introduction

The purpose of this project was to develop an effective program of supportive housing for teen families in Edmonton.

Research and evaluation were integrated throughout to aid the process and help inform adaptations over time. The project began four years ago through a partnership between Terra Centre, Brentwood Community Development Group, and the Community-University Partnership (CUP) for the Study of Children, Youth and Families at the University of Alberta. The resulting program, named Successful Families, has served 63 teen families since its inception.

- **Terra Centre** is a non-profit organization that has been supporting teen parents in Edmonton since the organization's inception over 40 years ago, with the general goal of helping pregnant and parenting teens to develop self-reliance and skills to reach their full potential as parents.
- **Brentwood Community Development Group** was formed in 1977 and has a mandate to build supportive communities that enable every child to reach their full potential through the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing.
- **The Community-University Partnership (CUP)** for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families is a research centre based at the University of Alberta that focuses on the development of children, youth, families and communities by creating or mobilizing evidence-based knowledge that impacts programs and policies.

*“A big part of what keeps me stable mentally is knowing I’m always gonna have a safe place for my child to be. We’re always gonna have a place to call home. And Brentwood is a big part of that and the subsidy program, and Terra.” (Parent)*

## PROJECT RATIONALE

Without access to safe and affordable housing, teen families can become stuck in a cycle of poverty, with negative implications for healthy child development. A lack of access to affordable and safe housing is exacerbated by the stigma and concerns about financial risk that surround teen parenting (Graham & McDermott, 2006). Such stigma leads to reluctance from many landlords to accept parents and their children as tenants. This problem has become more pronounced due to housing shortages across Edmonton and other Canadian cities (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014) and has left a significant number of teens with few alternatives but to raise their children in precarious circumstances (Karabanow & Hughes, 2013). Some teen families experience violence, addiction and crime on a daily basis, which drastically affects their capacity to parent (Cooke, 2013). Furthermore, a number of teen parents and children find themselves isolated from social support networks (McDonald et al., 2009). Without supportive networks, teen parents find it difficult to continue their education, reducing their chances of acquiring employment and upward mobility (Graham & McDermott, 2006). This can also make effective parenting more difficult (McDonald et al., 2009). In contrast, evidence suggests that teen mothers who have access to supports are better able to develop strong attachments with their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011), leading to better long-term outcomes for the children of teen parents. Wraparound approaches have been particularly successful in the provision of family-centered, comprehensive supports for families with complex needs (VanDenBerg, Bruns, & Burchard, 2008). Wraparound supports in combination with safe and secure housing therefore provide a complementary supportive housing approach.

Despite widespread consensus about the need for supportive housing, most approaches to homelessness have been emergency responses rather than preventative (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Focusing on emergency responses in isolation can undermine the need for an integrated approach to housing shortages. Preventative approaches such as the proposed project focus on the coordination of services and investment in supports to reduce the likelihood that young people and their children will become homeless in the first place (Gaetz & Dej, 2017).

This project additionally represents a shift away from short term or transitional housing toward permanent housing to increase the likelihood that parents can provide a consistent environment and enriched upbringing for their children.

Although the benefits of supportive housing have been extensively documented, there is currently a limited understanding about the best forms of support that should be provided alongside housing (Kirsh, Gewurtz, & Bakewell, 2011). Research on successful initiatives for supporting teen parents and their children is also particularly sparse (Karabanow & Hughes, 2013). This lack of an evidence base undermines effective decision-making given the specific needs of teen families and the high number of young people who become parents in Canada compared to other Western countries (McDonald et al., 2009). The current project sought to fill this evidence gap by contributing to the development of the supportive housing program for teen families and aiming to understand the impacts of the program.





## Research Design

### OBJECTIVES

With the intent of building knowledge to support the development of the supportive housing program, Terra Centre and Brentwood Community Development Group partnered with CUP at the University of Alberta.

#### THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

1. Develop and implement a supportive housing program for teen families, referred to as the Successful Families program; and
2. Examine the impacts of the program on teen families.

## **Objective 1: Develop and Implement the Successful Families Program**

To work towards the objective of developing and implementing the Successful Families supportive housing program, using research and evaluation as a tool to support this process, several sub-goals were identified:

- a. Assist teen families in obtaining and maintaining **safe, secure, and affordable housing** in order to prevent homelessness;
- b. Improve outcomes and promote healthy development for the **children** of teen parents;
- c. Improve outcomes for teen **parents** with respect to their role as parents and as individuals; and
- d. Develop a community of **supports and resources** for families.

## **Objective 2: Examine the Impacts of the Supportive Housing Program**

Development, implementation, and evaluation of the program occur simultaneously, which supports real-time learning in complex and emergent situations. The goal of evaluating, testing, and examining the impacts of the Successful Families program was to:

- a. Establish a **suitable and relevant program of supportive housing** so the program could be articulated for clarity of service delivery and shared with other community agencies; and
- b. Understand the **impacts** of the program on teen parents and their children.

## **METHODS**

To respond to the project objectives, a number of research and evaluation methods were used iteratively over four years to generate the information presented in this report. These methods included a literature review, participant observation during team meetings and onsite visits, staff interviews (individual and focus groups), photovoice with teen parents, self-report questionnaires and child development assessments, and program monitoring. Each of these methods is described below.

### **Literature review**

The research team conducted an integrative review (Torraco, 2005) of the academic and grey literature. The goal of the literature review was to map the existing field of knowledge regarding supportive housing for teen families in order to inform the development of the Successful Families program. University of Alberta Libraries databases were searched (e.g., Social Sciences Citation Index, Academic Search Complete) using different combinations of relevant search terms (e.g., teen(age) parents, supportive housing, child development, wraparound support, evaluation). This review revealed a limited body of literature related directly to supportive housing for teen families. As a result, literature is reviewed related to teen families more generally, as well as housing and homelessness, with a focus on describing why the provision of supportive housing is essential for teen families.

### **Participant observation**

Reflective of the participatory and collaborative nature of the research, CUP researchers attended program meetings and other events (such as summer barbeques and Christmas celebrations) to build relationships and gain a deeper contextual understanding of the program. Researchers also attend three core program meetings on a frequent basis as part of program development and implementation. “Operational Meetings” take place between the Brentwood Executive Director, Brentwood administrator, and Terra housing manager on a bi-weekly basis to provide updates on current and prospective participants and discuss program activities.



“Capture Meetings” are held monthly, during which the Terra housing manager meets with the three front-line program staff members to reflect on program activities, successes, and challenges. One or more researchers joined these meetings to participate in these reflective processes, ask questions, and share information back to the housing manager and front-line staff. Finally, “Annual Reflection Days” take place between the Brentwood leadership and administrative teams, Terra leadership team and front-line staff members, and the CUP research team to engage in strategic planning and reflection around the program. The reflections and learning from all three meetings are documented as meeting minutes and field notes.

### **Interviews and focus groups with staff**

To gain further understanding about the critical factors in providing supportive housing for teen families, individual interviews were conducted with seven staff members from Terra and Brentwood who are directly connected to the Successful Families program (i.e., Housing support staff, Terra Centre leadership, and Brentwood leadership). A CUP researcher conducted these individual interviews in person. Interviews were held at staff offices and lasted approximately 60 minutes each. The research team developed the semi-structured interview guide, which included questions about staff experiences with and knowledge of the supportive housing program; program challenges and successes; as well as hopes and recommendations for moving forward. Interviews were audio recorded with participants’ permission and transcribed verbatim. Finally, two focus groups were conducted with family outreach staff and services for educational achievement (SEA) staff from Terra, respectively. Six outreach staff and six SEA staff participated and each focus group lasted approximately one hour.

## Photovoice with teen parents

The photovoice method was used to gain insight from teen parents around supportive housing and their lives more generally. Photovoice involves a group of community members taking photos in response to an issue of importance to the community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Two rounds of photovoice were conducted with two different groups of parents, each spanning approximately six months (December, 2016 to May 2017; December 2017 to June 2018). We met with the parents on a bi-weekly basis and spent approximately two hours together each time. In total, 14 teen parents participated in the photovoice project. Typically, between four and six participants were present at each group. Two researchers facilitated the first round, and one researcher and a housing support staff (HSS) worker facilitated the second. We changed the model of facilitation for the second round so that it would emulate a ‘train-the-trainer’ model and HSS could continue to use photovoice as an ongoing method of inquiry with program participants.

Each meeting began with a meal shared by the teen parent participants, their children, program staff, and the researchers. After the meal, Terra staff provided childcare for participants’ children while the parents engaged in the photovoice group. The group started by outlining the purpose of the photovoice project and discussing logistical details around choosing the subjects of photos and sharing photos.

### **GROUPS BEGAN BY ASKING TEEN PARENTS TO TAKE PHOTOS THAT ANSWERED TWO GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

1. What is important to you as a parent?
2. What do you need in order to help your children grow and develop in healthy ways?

Parents took photos in response to the two questions and sent them to a member of the research team to print before the following session. During each group session, discussion centered on the photos, parents' perspectives on the supportive housing program, and their experiences as teen parents more generally. During the second round of photovoice, more arts-based methods were integrated into the group as an additional way to stimulate discussion. All group discussions were audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim.

### **Self-report questionnaires and child development assessments**

All participants were invited to complete self-report questionnaires and child development assessments. Multiple methods were used to recruit participants for this portion of the research, and relationships between the research team and housing staff allowed for a multi-pronged approach. To recruit participants, the research team attended community events such as a community barbeque and summer events at the park, and held a research information evening which participants could attend to sign up for the project. In addition, staff recruited participants directly, and facilitated contact and appointment booking between the researchers and participants.

Data collection took place in person. Participants had the option to complete the self-report questionnaires and child development assessments at the Terra house (situated directly across from the families' housing and in which the Terra housing staff are based) or at their own homes. An informal event was also held where participants baked Christmas cookies with staff members while their children completed assessments. Participants received gift cards for their participation and were provided with brief feedback reports from the child development assessments. Five self-report questionnaires and two child development assessments (depending on children's age) were used, and are described below.

## *PARENTS*

### *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) was used to measure participants' attitudes of rejection or approval toward themselves. The questionnaire has ten items that are rated on a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire has strong psychometric properties and is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem in North America (Sinclair et al., 2010).

### *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)*

The CD-RISC (Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a 25-item questionnaire and was used to measure parent's resilience. Each item is rated on a five-point scale, with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. The CD-RISC has strong psychometric properties (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Davidson & Connor, 2016). Researchers have also validated the CD-RISC for use with a wide variety of diverse populations. The CD-RISC was chosen for use in the current project because of its validation in the general population as well as clinical samples and diverse cultures.

### *Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory - Second Edition (AAPI-2)*

The AAPI-2 (Bavolek & Keene, 2010) is designed to assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of adult and adolescent parent and pre-parent populations. This 40-item inventory is rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The AAPI-2 provides an index of risk on five specific parenting and child rearing behaviors, described more fully in the results section of this report. The AAPI-2 was chosen for use in the current project because of its strong psychometric properties (Bavolek & Keene, 2016) and design for specific use with parents as young as age 13.

*Behaviour Assessment Scale for Children – Third Edition Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (BASC-3 PRQ)*

The BASC-3 PRQ (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2015) is designed to capture a parent's perspective on the parent-child relationship for parents of children aged 2-18. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. There are seven BASC-3 PRQ scales, described in the results section of this report. Normative scores are based on the child's age and parent's gender. The BASC-3 PRQ has strong construct, content, and criterion-related validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2015).

*Participant survey*

To obtain feedback on the program, as well as identify the areas in which participants perceived that they were experiencing growth, the research team developed a 21-item survey in consultation with Terra and Brentwood staff. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

*CHILDREN*

*Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development – Third Edition (Bayley-III)*

The Bayley-III (Bayley, 2006) is an individually administered assessment of developmental functioning for children between 1 and 42 months of age. The Bayley-III is used to identify developmental delays, assist in intervention planning, and elevate understanding of a child's strengths and challenges in five developmental domains (Piñon, 2010). The Bayley-III has strong internal consistency, inter-rater and test-retest reliability, as well as construct, content, and criterion-related validity (Bayley, 2006). The Bayley-III was chosen for use in the current project because of its strong psychometric properties, coverage of multiple developmental domains, and engaging, play-based format.

## *NEPSY-II*

The NEPSY-II (Korkman, Kirk, & Kemp, 2007) is an individually administered assessment of neurocognitive functioning for children between 4 and 18 years of age. The NEPSY-II has strong internal consistency, inter-rater and test-retest reliability, as well as construct, content, and criterion-related validity (Korkman et al., 2007). The NEPSY-II was chosen for use in the current study for children who were older than 42 months of age, and who therefore could not be assessed with the Bayley-III.

## **Program Monitoring**

A database called Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) is used by Terra at an agency level to track information on participants and the supports they receive.

For example, ETO can track the number of home visits received, critical incidents, and educational or employment status. Data is inputted by frontline staff and can be tracked monthly, or over the span of years. It can also be analyzed at individual or aggregate levels.





## **ANALYSIS**

The data produced from these methods were analyzed using two main analytic procedures. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while the quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics.

### **Thematic analysis**

Balancing an exploratory approach with a focus on practicality, we used thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a flexible and practical method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two researchers reviewed all of the qualitative data (interview and focus group transcripts, and meeting notes) and, using an iterative process, collectively chose a way to present the data so that it tells a comprehensive story about the Successful Families program. The data is woven together in an integrated way rather than presented as discrete sections by method.

### **Descriptive statistics**

All quantitative data were entered into a Microsoft Excel database. Raw data for the Bayley-III, NEPSY-II, AAPI-2, and BASC-3 PRQ were converted to standard scores using the published norms available for each tool, and descriptive statistics were calculated using the standard scores for these tools. For each of these tools, the number of participants who fell into descriptive categories established by the tool developers (e.g., below average, average, above average) is presented in the results section that follows. For the participant survey, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and CD-RISC, descriptive statistics were calculated using raw scores because norms and standard score conversions have not been developed. For these tools, descriptive categories (e.g., below average, average, above average) have also not been developed, and results are therefore presented as average raw scores.

The remainder of this document uses the literature and data gathered through the research to document both the need for supportive housing for teen families, and the Successful Families program as a response to this need. The information is presented in three main sections:

- **Framing the Issue: Supportive Housing for Teen Families**

This section presents the grey and academic literature reviewed relating to two main areas: 1) Teen Families, and 2) Housing and Homelessness. Each of these areas is further broken down into a number of sub categories that collectively describe why the provision of supportive housing is essential for teen families. Quotes from parents in the Successful Families program are integrated throughout to illustrate personalized experiences of the themes documented in the literature.

- **Responding to the Issue: The Successful Families Program**

This section provides a detailed overview of Successful Families as a program that responds to the need for supportive housing for teen families. Each area corresponds to a different level of the Successful Families model, starting with the families at the centre of the model, and working outwards through the various supportive structures that aim to 'wraparound' the families. As such, the program overview is divided into six themes: 1) Families, 2) Supports and Services, 3) Affordable, Safe and Secure Housing, 4) The Partnership, 5) Community Connections, and 6) Integrated Research and Evaluation.

- **Ongoing Challenges and Areas for Improvement**

This section outlines the ongoing challenges that are experienced with(in) the program and offers areas for further improvement in providing supportive housing for teen families. These challenges are categorized in terms of supports, participants, housing, staff, and research and evaluation.



## Framing the Issue: Supportive Housing for Teen Families

This section presents the grey and academic literature that was reviewed relating to two main areas: 1) Teen Families, and 2) Housing and Homelessness.

Each of the areas is further broken down into a number of sub categories that collectively describe why the provision of supportive housing is essential for teen families. Quotes from parents in the Successful Families program are integrated throughout to illustrate personalized experiences of the themes documented in the literature.

### TEEN FAMILIES

#### Poverty

Teen parenthood and poverty are closely intertwined (Mollborn, 2017). Data from a nationally representative study of American families revealed that approximately half of teen mothers were living in poverty when their children were infants, and 56% of all children living in poverty were born to teen mothers (Mollborn & Dennis, 2012). However, the relationship between teen parenthood and poverty is complex and defies simplistic notions of cause and effect (Bissell, 2000).

While teen parenthood has been cited as a primary cause of social and economic disadvantage since the mid-1960's, evidence from a growing number of studies suggests that teen parenthood may be more accurately conceptualized as a marker of experiencing poverty and, often concomitantly, belonging to a disadvantaged minority group (Furstenberg, 2016). Teen parents disproportionately represent groups who experience disadvantage or marginalization in terms of social class, race and ethnicity, geographic location, sexual orientation, and other characteristics – many of which are interrelated (Mollborn & Dennis, 2012). For example, in Canada teen pregnancy is four times higher among First Nations adolescents and 18 times higher on reserves than in the general population (Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2000).

Studies suggest that disadvantage experienced prior to and after becoming a teen parent, such as social inequity, marginalization, discrimination, and adverse childhood experiences, are largely responsible for the negative social and economic outcomes experienced by teen parents relative to those who delay childbearing (Kearney & Levine, 2012; Mollborn, 2017; SmithBattle, Lorman, Chantamit-o-pas, & Kraenzle Schneider, 2017). Many researchers now recognize that without addressing the factors that contribute to teen parenthood and poor parent and child outcomes, such as poverty, interventions and programs will fail to contribute to lasting change in the lives of teenage parents and their children (Furstenberg, 2016; Hoffman, 2015; Mollborn, 2017; Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009; SmithBattle et al., 2017).

The need to implement more comprehensive approaches to supporting teen families has become increasingly important due to widening social and economic disparities (SmithBattle et al., 2017). Although teen pregnancy rates in Canada and the United States have been in decline for several decades, with Canada's rate approximately half that of the US at 28 teen pregnancies per 1000 females (Sedgh, Finer, Bankole, Eilers, & Singh, 2015), today's economic and social context places teen mothers at greater disadvantage than has been the case historically (Driscoll, 2014). Comparisons between teen and older mothers indicate that, across birth cohorts, gaps in poverty and single motherhood have widened (Driscoll, 2014). Gaps in educational attainment have also persisted.

*“Without supports, you feel isolated because all you can think about is, ‘how am I gonna take care of this child when I have to go to school, keep food in the fridge, and pay my bills?’” (Parent)*

While teen pregnancy and parenthood may not be a root cause of social disadvantage, teen families face increasing challenges in a climate characterized by greater economic inequality and increased importance of education as a means of economic mobility.

### **Additional Challenges**

In addition to, and often compounded by, poverty and social disadvantage, teen parents experience a range of complex challenges unique to the experience of becoming a parent in adolescence. Parenthood represents a significant alteration to the developmental trajectory of adolescence (Bohr, Dhayanandhan, Summers, & Kanter, 2011). Teen parents are often experiencing their own developmental changes while they assume their new parental roles and learn to navigate their children's development (Bohr et al., 2011). The unique challenges associated with early parenthood can place teen parents at a heightened risk for a variety of poor outcomes, including low educational attainment, parenting difficulties, and mental health challenges (Bonell et al., 2005; Harden et al., 2006; Mollborn, Lawrence, James-Hawkins, & Fomby, 2014; Lehti et al., 2012).

Pregnancy in adolescence often coincides not only with an important period of developmental change and identity formation, but also the high school years. Given the well-established association between educational attainment and experiences in later life (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), many studies of the outcomes of teen pregnancy have focused on educational outcomes, including high school and post-secondary completion, for teen mothers (Mollborn, 2017). While previous studies have shown that teen mothers tend to have lower educational attainment than those who delay childbearing (Diaz & Fiel, 2016; Mollborn, 2017), more recent studies emphasize the heterogeneity of teen parents and dispute the extent to which educational disparities are the result of teen parenthood or preexisting social disadvantage. Regardless of this stance, raising children while attending high school or post-secondary education does confer unique challenges for parents, in part because these events are accompanied by several practical barriers to educational attainment including sleep disruptions, the need to find adequate childcare, and increased financial responsibilities (Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, 2008).

Public discourses and stigmas centered on teen parents can further impair their progress towards educational goals. In addition to simplistic discourses citing teen pregnancy as a primary cause of poverty and other social problems, authors applying a critical lens to the rhetoric around teen pregnancy have identified other negative and destructive ways in which the media frames teen pregnancy and parenting (Bales & O'Neil, 2008). One of the most common frames perpetuated by the media is the notion of teen pregnancy as a moral failing, with emphasis placed on a lack of values, faulty decisions, and misguided mindsets. By frequently pairing teen pregnancy statistics with negative health outcomes, the media has also popularized the perception of teen parenting as a problem that requires eradication. These negative constructions of teen pregnancy and parenting can contribute to decreased empathy for teen parents, and do not leave space for public perceptions of teen parents as active and contributing community members (Bales & O'Neil, 2008).

Indeed, expectant teen mothers often experience judgement, stigma, and unwelcome attention in the school setting that follows them through the transition to parenthood (SmithBattle, 2013). Teen parents may be expected to pursue education and careers in order to avoid perpetuating cycles of poverty, while concurrently experiencing judgement for placing their children in non-parental childcare arrangements in order to attend school or work (Mollborn & Blalock, 2012). Furthermore, the stigmas associated with teen parenting impact the opportunities afforded to young families. Teen parents have reported that many mainstream schools are hesitant to re-engage them after they have a child (Dawson, 2006). In addition to educational institutions, teen parents have also described experiences of judgement and hostility from social service agencies and health care providers (McDermott & Graham, 2005). A lack of social support can make it increasingly difficult for teen parents to continue their education, thus reducing their employability at a time when educational qualifications are becoming increasingly important, and excluding them from an important avenue for upward mobility (Driscoll, 2014; Graham & McDermott, 2006).

*“In my head is a lot of anxiety and depression. And I hear people say, she needs to lose weight, she’s unhealthy, a bad mom, unfit for her daughter. But regardless of what’s in my head, my heart is still so big for my daughter.” (Parent)*



Tensions between the role of a typical teenager and the role of a parent can also affect teen parents' mental wellbeing, and can complicate the development of empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness towards their children (Corlyon & Stock, 2011; Mayers, Hager-Budny, & Buckner, 2008). Compared to older parents, teens can lack confidence in their parenting skills, as well as accurate information and expectations about their children's developmental milestones (Bornstein & Patrick, 2007; Dallas, Wilson, & Salgado, 2000; Letourneau, Stewart, & Barnfather, 2004).

*"I want to know what I can do to help [my son] get to developmental milestones." (Parent)*

Higher rates of depression observed in teen mothers can also have implications for the health and development of both teen mothers and their children (Slomski Long, 2009). Experiencing depression can make it more difficult for parents to provide responsive caregiving and can therefore impact children in terms of health, educational, social-emotional and behavioural outcomes (Casey et al., 2004; Dahlen, 2016; Frank & Meara, 2009; Perry, 2008).

## **Parent Resilience**

Although the challenges associated with teen parenting have been well documented, there has been far less focus on the strengths and resilience of teen parents. However, research exploring the complexities of teen parents' experiences has challenged the overwhelmingly negative discourses around teen parents and the consequences of teen parenthood (Mollborn, 2017). Some of this research has focused instead on the ways teenage pregnancy can be a positive event and catalyst for growth in the lives of some young parents and their children (Duncan, Edwards, & Alexander, 2010; Price-Robertson, 2010). For example, a recent study showed that, relative to a matched control group of non-childbearing teens, teen mothers showed a reduction in conduct problems, no change in alcohol use (the control group showed significant increases in alcohol use), and reduced marijuana use during the first six months following delivery (Hipwell, Murray, Xiong, Stepp, & Keenan, 2016). In some instances, teenage pregnancy can serve as motivation to instigate positive lifestyle changes and encourage teens to defy stereotypes and negative expectations by pursuing educational and vocational goals (Clemmens, 2003). Many young parents have reported that having a child provided their lives with a renewed sense of meaning, as well as a positive sense of maturity and responsibility (Mendes, 2009).

Despite widespread public attention on the poor outcomes associated with teen parenting, there are a significant proportion of teen parents who successfully meet their own developmental needs, as well as the needs of their children (e.g., Lee et al., 2016). Although many teen parents experience multiple risk factors, challenges, and stigmas, the presence of protective factors in their lives can insulate teen parents from risks and help them to navigate disadvantages (Collins, 2010). Pursuing educational goals, possessing protective individual characteristics, having strong social supports to rely on, and accessing support services represent factors that can promote resilience for teen families (Collins, 2010; Osofsky, Hann, & Peebles, 1993).

Several studies identify that pursuing and achieving educational goals can buffer teen families from disadvantage (Hofferth, Reid, & Mott, 2001; Osofsky et al. 1993; Seitz & Apfel, 1999; Stephens, Wolf, & Batten, 1999). Researchers have shown improved outcomes for teen mothers and their children when mothers complete high school, including improved financial situations, and better behavioural, social, and academic development of children (Hofferth et al., 2001; Seitz & Apfel, 1999; Stephens et al., 1999). Studies have also revealed a number of individual strengths and capacities that can serve as protective factors for teen families, including high self-esteem, good problem-solving skills, motivation, and a strong sense of identity (Collins, 2010; Osofsky et al., 1993). Additional personal characteristics of teen parents associated with resilience include taking responsibility, learning from the past, viewing one's life in a wider context, having goals and aspirations, and taking pride in one's achievements (Collins, 2010).

Strong social support from family, friends, and partners consistently emerges as a protective factor for teen parents (Collins, 2010; Narendorf, Williams Jennings, & Santa Maria, 2016; Osofsky et al., 1993). A survey of homeless pregnant and parenting young adults found that homeless parents reported greater levels of social support than their non-parenting peers, suggesting that parenthood might facilitate the (re)establishment of connections with sources of social support (Narendorf et al., 2016).

*“The fact that I wanna give my child a future. That’s what keeps me going through everything I go through.” (Parent)*

Stable relationships between parents (Osofsky et al., 1993), as well as a positive co-parenting relationship (how parents relate to each other in their parenting roles separate from any romantic relationship, whether cohabiting or not) have also been associated with improved outcomes for the children of teen parents (Lewin, Mitchell, Beers, Feinberg, & Minkovitz, 2012).

Further demonstrating the role of support in promoting resilience for teen families, teen parents' qualitative accounts of the factors associated with resilience illustrate the importance of comprehensive early intervention services that address mothers' and children's complex needs (Collins, 2010). Teen mothers who have access to supports are better able to develop strong attachments with their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Flaherty & Sadler, 2011), leading to better long-term child outcomes (Groh, Pasco Fearon, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Roisman, 2017). In addition to supporting teen families' social, educational, and economic needs, service providers can build teen parents' resilience to challenges by helping them to identify, develop, and build on individual strengths and capacities. Service providers may also promote resilience for teen parents by assisting them with establishing and strengthening supportive relationships, and by including other supportive adults in service planning (Narendorf et al., 2016).

## **Child Outcomes**

Teen pregnancy has important consequences not only for teen parents, but also for their children (Mollborn, 2017). Contrary to public perceptions, the children of teen parents do not comprise a homogenous group equally at risk for poor developmental outcomes. For example, Lee et al. (2016) found that over half of 17-year-olds born to teen mothers demonstrated healthy psychological, academic, and behavioural development. However, compared to the general population, children born to teen mothers do disproportionately experience negative outcomes in several domains of development (Jutte et al., 2010). The children of teen parents may therefore have an elevated risk for experiencing many of the same challenges likely encountered by their parents, including high school incompleteness, unemployment, and teen parenthood (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Belsky, & Silva, 2001; Lipman, Georgiades, & Boyle, 2011).

Similarly to studies of outcomes for teen parents, studies examining outcomes for the children of teen parents have often failed to distinguish between the impacts of the social disadvantage associated with teen parenting and the impacts of teen parenting per se (Lawlor & Shaw, 2002; Mayers et al., 2008). However, several studies exploring the causal pathways between these variables indicate that social disadvantage and poverty experienced prior to and after the child's birth account for much of the relationship between teen pregnancy and child outcomes (Lee et al., 2016; Mollborn & Dennis, 2012). For example, Mollborn and Dennis (2012a) found that controlling for financial, social, and material resources substantially or completely diminished the disadvantages experienced by the children of teen mothers in many domains of development. Similarly, a later study found strong support for the hypothesis that persistently low socioeconomic resources contribute to the widening disparities between children of teen and older parents across early childhood (Mollborn et al., 2014).

To minimize the intergenerational transmission of risk and negative outcomes to the children of teen parents, policymakers should focus on addressing the persistent social disadvantage experienced by many teen families (Mollborn & Dennis, 2012; Mollborn et al., 2014; Sabates & Dex, 2015). Teen families need financial, social, and material support throughout and beyond the teen years (Khatun et al., 2017; Lipman, 2011). This may include income supplements, low-cost childcare, support for education and employment, and affordable housing (Mollborn & Dennis, 2012).

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

### Risk to Teen Families

Teen parents are particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness (Dworsky, Morton, & Samuels, 2018). Homelessness is described as a lack of stable, permanent, and appropriate housing, and encompasses a range of circumstances (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Homeless families may be unstably sheltered (living in a temporary or short-term housing situation), emergency sheltered (staying in a shelter), or unsheltered (living on the streets or a place unintended for human habitation; Gaetz et al., 2012). Homelessness is the result of a complex interplay of structural factors (e.g., poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable housing), systems failures (e.g., barriers to access, silos and gaps within and between government systems and the non-profit sector), and individual circumstances (e.g., teen pregnancy, crises, interpersonal problems/violence, disabilities, trauma; Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Homelessness is often the outcome of the cumulative impact of several factors.

Compared to their non-parent peers, both male and female teen parents are at significantly greater risk of experiencing homelessness (Dworsky et al., 2018). Furthermore, while teen pregnancy and parenting can be a precursor to or risk factor for homelessness, young women experiencing homelessness are also more likely to become pregnant than those who are housed (Dworsky & Meehan, 2012). Homeless teens engage in risky sexual behaviours at higher rates than their stably housed counterparts, often as part of a survival strategy that puts them at greater risk of becoming pregnant (Dworsky & Meehan, 2012). While it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of homeless teens who are pregnant or parents, numerous studies have found higher pregnancy rates among teens experiencing homelessness than those who are stably housed, especially for women (Dworsky & Meehan, 2012). National and regional studies from the United States and Canada report rates of pregnancy and parenthood ranging from 30% to 60% for homeless young women (Begun, 2015; Dworsky et al., 2018; Haley, Roy, Leclerc, Boudreau, & Boivin, 2004).

*“My mom and dad left me with nothing.... They kicked me out when I was 16. Of course I had good times with my parents but at the same time, they were always high and drunk. My siblings... we were all taking care of each other. It just got so bad over the years. Especially my dad. My dad’s homeless now because he couldn’t give his shit up. I don’t ever want my child to see that, I don’t want my child to struggle.... I want my child to have what’s best for him. And if that means me going through years of school and working my ass off until I’m however years old, I’ll do it just to make sure my child has the best life he can.” (Parent)*

Rates of parenthood for young men experiencing homelessness tend to be lower; a recent national survey of homeless youth in the United States found that 18% of men aged 18-25 were parents or had a pregnant partner (Dworsky et al., 2018). Whether the teens and young adults in these studies became homeless prior to or after becoming pregnant is often unclear.

Teen parents' pathways into homelessness indicate a high degree of vulnerability, which may include experiences of chronic poverty, violence and abuse, and exiting the foster care system (Cooke & Owen, 2007). Teenage parents may not be able to, or may prefer not to, live with their own parents for a variety of reasons including financial difficulties, crowding, abuse, or parental rejection (Andrews & Moore, 2011; Dworsky et al., 2018; United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). In a survey of pregnant and parenting teens living in Michigan, Sarri and Phillips (2004) found that only half of the young women surveyed were living with a parent. Nearly a quarter were living in out-of-home placements, including shelters, group homes, and transition programs, while 15% were living with friends, partners, or independently. Demonstrating the housing instability often experienced by pregnant and parenting teens, more than half of the young women had experienced a change in their housing situation during the previous six months (Sarri & Phillips, 2004).

Teen parents frequently identify housing as a source of stress (Sarri & Phillips, 2004), especially those from more disadvantaged families or living in more disadvantaged areas (Smith & Roberts, 2011). This may be because disadvantaged areas are often characterized by low-quality, insecure, and crowded housing (Evans, 2010; Wellings et al., 2005), as well as fewer social services and higher unemployment rates (Sarri & Phillips, 2004). Challenges with securing appropriate housing are exacerbated by the stigma that surrounds teen parenting, contributing to reluctance from many landlords to accept teen families as tenants (Graham & McDermott, 2006).

Many teen parents are unable to afford housing due to a lack of employment or inability to work (Andrews & Moore, 2011; United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). They are also often ineligible for social assistance or benefits due to their age, living arrangement, marital status, or lack of employment (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). Policy and legislation often assume that teen parents will be supported by their own parents. These policies ignore the complex circumstances that many teen parents face before they become parents, and which are further complicated by the added responsibilities of parenting.

Significant gaps also exist in the availability of housing services for young parents who are homeless (Dworsky et al., 2018). A recent survey of 142 homeless youth service providers operating in the United States found that only 38% offered at least one program for parenting youth (Dworsky et al., 2018). Shelters and transitional homes rarely accept minors unaccompanied by an adult, and many do not accept young children (Andrews & Moore, 2011). When housing services do accept teen mothers and their children, they often prohibit their male partners from sharing their accommodations and place restrictions on the amount of time that children's fathers can visit (Smid, Bourgois, & Auerswald, 2010; Smith & Roberts, 2011). Some young mothers may be unwilling to leave their partners to obtain housing (Smid et al., 2010). Furthermore, few housing services are equipped to support single fathers accompanied by children (Narendorf et al., 2016). Given the challenges experienced by teen parents around housing instability and the gaps in available services and supports, the provision of safe and secure housing for teen families has been identified as a key issue in supporting the success of teen parents and their children (Corlyon & Stock, 2011). Without access to subsidized and supportive housing, many pregnant and parenting teens will be unable to find secure, appropriate housing and provide a stable environment for their children (Smid et al., 2010).

*"No one wants to rent to a 16 year old. They wonder, what did she do to get kicked out of her foster home?"  
(Parent)*

*"I tried to get tenant insurance when I had my first apartment at 17 and they wouldn't give it to me because I was under 18. I couldn't even get a power bill under my name. I had to put it under my dad's name." (Parent)*



## Impacts of Homelessness

Homelessness can exacerbate the challenges and risks associated with teenage childbearing for young parents and their children (Begun, 2015; Dworsky & Meehan, 2012). Compared to teen parents who are securely housed, homeless teen parents are more likely to live in unstable and potentially dangerous situations, are less likely to have supportive relationships, and are more likely to have unmet basic needs (Dworsky & Meehan, 2012). The stresses of pregnancy and parenting can make it more difficult for teen parents to transition out of homelessness (Begun, 2015). In turn, a longer duration of homelessness may intensify mental health challenges among a population that already exhibits elevated rates of mental health problems (Begun, 2015; Slomski Long, 2009). When parents and their children lack access to safe, secure, and affordable housing, families can become stuck in cycles of poverty, with negative implications for healthy child development (Graham & McDermott, 2006).

Homeless families are not a static and discrete group, but rather emerge from a broader population of low-income families and will generally transition out of homelessness (Buckner, 2008). These families face a range of risk factors, some which are indirectly related to homelessness and are common among families experiencing poverty, and others which are unique to the experience of homelessness (for example, staying in an emergency shelter or transitional housing; Cutuli & Herbers, 2014). Homelessness often represents a period of acute risk for children who experience chronic, long-term risks such as poverty (Cutuli & Herbers, 2014). Given that homelessness is one of the many stressors experienced by children and families affected by poverty, it is difficult to ascertain whether child outcomes are attributable to housing status as opposed to other factors related to poverty, and whether homeless children exhibit poorer outcomes relative to low-income housed children. Indeed, many studies document effects caused by exposure to poverty-related risks that contribute to poorer scores on a variety of outcomes such as mental health and behavioural problems, developmental status, and academic achievement among both homeless and low-income housed children compared to the general population (Buckner, 2008).

*“My son is learning so much living here with me. He’s potty trained day and night, can brush his teeth and is learning how to fold his own laundry. This is our home as a family where he is learning and growing everyday with less stress than if we didn’t have all of these supports.” (Parent)*

However, with increasing methodological rigour, researchers have been able to isolate the unique effects of homelessness on outcomes such as academic achievement (Buckner, 2008; Cutuli & Herbers, 2014). Homelessness and residential instability are consistently related to lower levels of achievement, even after accounting for poverty and other risk factors (Cutuli & Herbers, 2014). Unsurprisingly, repeated moves during early childhood also predict lower behaviour scores among children (Mollborn, Lawrence, & Dowling Root, 2018). Furthermore, the timing of the experience of homelessness affects the risk of negative impacts on children's achievement (Cutuli & Herbers, 2014). Early childhood represents a particularly salient period for the effects of homelessness on academic achievement.

### **Affordable Housing**

Families with children now constitute the fastest growing segment of an increasingly diverse homeless population (Bassuk, 2010). Rising poverty and a lack of affordable housing are major contributors to the rising rates of family homelessness in Canada and the United States (Gulliver-Garcia, 2016; Rollins, Saris, & Johnston-Robledo, 2001). In Canada, challenges with securing housing have become more pronounced due to affordable housing shortages across Edmonton and other Canadian cities (Gaetz et al., 2014), and has left a significant number of teens with few alternatives but to raise their children in unstable circumstances (Karabanow & Hughes, 2013). When affordable housing becomes scarce, the most vulnerable families are most likely to be affected by homelessness (Buckner, 2008). Indeed, most parents experiencing homelessness are young, single mothers living in poverty (Bassuk, 2010; Gulliver-Garcia, 2016).

According to the definition provided by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), housing is affordable when a household spends less than 30% of its pre-tax income on shelter (CMHC, 2018). Affordable housing is a broad term that can encompass spaces along the entire housing continuum, from emergency shelters to transitional housing, supportive housing, subsidized/social housing, market rental housing, and market homeownership. Affordable housing can include housing provided by the private, public, and non-profit sectors, and both temporary and permanent housing.

Families who spend more than 30% of their income on housing are considered to be in core housing need, and those who spend greater than 50% are in severe housing need. In 2010, more than 1 in 3 Canadian families spent greater than 30% of their incomes on housing, with 27% in core housing need and 10% in severe housing need. In Edmonton, a large number of families experience housing affordability challenges and are at risk for experiencing housing instability and homelessness (City of Edmonton, 2015). Approximately 41% of renter households in Edmonton live in unaffordable housing, and families with children comprise nearly a third of those struggling with housing affordability.

In Canada, responsibility for housing policy is shared by the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government. However, the distribution of roles and responsibilities across these levels and departments contributes to great complexity in developing a systemic affordable housing strategy (Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, 2007). Municipalities serve a frontline role in approving zoning and projects, as well as assessing the housing needs of communities, but rely on dedicated funding from the provincial and federal governments to increase the supply of affordable housing (Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, 2007; City of Edmonton, 2015). At the provincial level, an array of provincial government departments contributes to the development of land use policies and housing initiatives (Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, 2007). Although the federal government has distinct affordable housing programs (Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, 2007), the dissolution of Canada's federal social housing program in 1993 resulted in large reductions in the availability of affordable housing, as well as increasingly fragmented data on social and affordable housing in Canada (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017a).

Social housing – housing that is subsidized by a level of government (often in collaboration with the private and non-profit sectors) – provides housing for those who are unable to afford suitable and adequate housing in the private rental or home ownership market (Housing Services Corporation, 2014). All social housing meets the criteria for affordable housing, and social housing comprises 6% of Canada’s housing market. Today, the responsibility for decision-making regarding the administration, design, and funding of social housing programs has been transferred to the provinces and territories (Housing Services Corporation, 2014), who administer approximately 80% of Canada’s social housing. In Alberta, the provincial government oversees or supports approximately 26,500 social housing units, and over 400 municipal, private, and non-profit organizations provide housing for Albertans struggling with housing affordability (Housing Services Corporation, 2014).

The 10-year National Housing Strategy introduced in 2017 by the federal government represents a renewed attempt to develop a pan-Canadian approach to housing (Government of Canada, 2017). The \$40-billion investment may help to reverse the loss of affordable housing options created by the cancellation of the federal social housing program in the 1990’s. This strategy prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable, including women and children fleeing family violence, seniors, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, those with mental health and addiction issues, veterans, young adults, recent immigrants and those experiencing homelessness. In recognition that women are disproportionately affected by homelessness and face unique barriers to accessing housing, the federal government has committed 25% of the National Housing Strategy investments to projects for women, girls, and their families, and outlines strategies specifically targeting the needs of women and girls. These include ongoing consultations, community housing subsidies, new and repaired shelter spaces, targeted research on women’s housing needs, affordable housing for senior women, improved affordable housing options, increased shelter space, and a human rights-based approach to housing. The National Housing Strategy is also accompanied by a commitment from the federal government to partner with provinces and territories to develop a \$4-billion housing benefit launching in 2020, although eligibility has not yet been determined.

The federal government's increased commitment to providing affordable housing for vulnerable families has promise, given that policies to promote affordable housing may improve housing stability for teen families (Carrion et al., 2014). Historically, however, eligibility requirements have often excluded teen parents from housing services and benefits (Andrews & Moore, 2001; United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). If teen parents are to benefit from these new strategies, more long-term housing spaces must be created that accept teen parents, accommodate various family arrangements, and provide additional supports (Smid et al., 2010). Policymakers must recognize the ways in which teen parents have been excluded from social assistance and benefits, and implement legislation and policies that ensure these families receive the support they need to secure safe, affordable, and appropriate housing.

### **Prevention-Based Strategies to Address Homelessness**

The literature identifies three basic strategies to address homelessness: 1) implementing mechanisms to reduce the risk of becoming homeless; 2) providing emergency services; and 3) transitioning people into housing with supports to reduce the risk of recurrence (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Homelessness prevention encompasses the first and third of these strategies, referring to policies, practices, and interventions that aim to reduce the likelihood of experiencing homelessness, as well as stabilize the housing situations of those who have experienced homelessness. In Canada, much greater effort, attention, and financial resources have been invested in emergency services, such as shelters, meal programs, and outreach services, than prevention. This disproportionate focus has resulted in the institutionalization of services intended to manage crises in the short-term, but which fail to provide long-term solutions to the causes and consequences of homelessness. However, preventative approaches that promote the coordination of services and supports can reduce the likelihood that teen parents and their children will become homeless in the first place (Gaetz & Dej, 2017).

While several communities have implemented prevention programs, there are few instances where these programs have been broadly applied or adopted in policy and legislation (Gaetz & Dej, 2017).

Moreover, isolated prevention programs cannot address the multiple structural, systems-level, and individual factors that contribute to homelessness (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). Responding to the complex nature of homelessness for teen parents will require efforts to create alignment, collaboration, and integration across the private sector, community housing providers, and all levels of government, as well as intersectoral collaboration among government departments (Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, 2007; Gaetz & Dej, 2017).

Informed by the 3-tiered public health model of prevention, Gaetz and Dej (2017) developed a continuum of intervention for homelessness prevention. Primary prevention encompasses efforts to address structural and systems factors that contribute to housing instability and increase a person's risk of experiencing homelessness. Examples of primary prevention include implementing poverty reduction strategies, building and maintaining affordable housing, providing early childhood supports, and supporting education.

Targeted towards individuals and families at immediate risk of homelessness or who have recently experienced homelessness, secondary prevention refers to strategies intended to address the early stages of homelessness (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). These strategies are intended to help people retain their housing (e.g., landlord-tenant mediation, rent banks), or rapidly obtain alternative stable, safe, affordable, and appropriate housing. Secondary prevention strategies also address systems factors that contribute to homelessness by working with the mental health, child protection, and correctional systems to prevent individuals from transitioning out of these institutions and into homelessness.

Finally, tertiary prevention describes strategies to quickly transition those experiencing homelessness into stable housing (Gaetz & Dej, 2017). A key aim of tertiary prevention strategies is to reduce the likelihood that people will experience homelessness again in the future. This often involves providing tailored supports and services to address the complex risk factors in the pathways to homelessness for individuals and families.

Supports may include case management, rent supplements, income supports, employment training, health care, and mental health and addictions services (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017b). By helping individuals to develop and strengthen protective factors such as individual capacities and social support networks, these supports and services help to buffer against the risk of lapsing back into homelessness (Karabanow, Hughes, & Hadley, 2009).

## **Supportive Housing**

There is evidence to suggest that participation in supportive housing initiatives can result in significant benefits to people experiencing vulnerable circumstances (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Supportive housing is the provision of long-term, affordable, independent housing in combination with flexible, individualized, accessible supports (Rog et al., 2014). In a supportive housing model, property management and social service providers collaborate to coordinate their services to promote the residential stability of tenants (Hannigan & Wagner, 2003). A strategy spanning both the secondary and tertiary levels of the continuum of homelessness prevention initiatives, supportive housing typically targets those at risk for or who have a history of experiencing homelessness (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2017). Supportive housing was originally designed to allow single adults with severe mental illnesses to live independently in the community (Gewirtz, 2007; Hannigan & Wagner, 2003; Tabol, Drebing, & Rosenheck, 2010). Today, the supportive housing model has been used to address the complex needs of a range of vulnerable populations, including teen parents.

Integrated, complementary supports and resources comprise the foundation of a supportive housing program (Desiderio et al., 2010). Through consultations with a national advisory group of partners in the fields of housing, child welfare, transitional living, and pregnant/parenting teen programs, Desiderio et al. (2010) identified five core components or critical elements of supportive housing programs for pregnant and parenting teens. These are supports and resources to promote: 1) self-sufficiency; 2) housing stability; 3) financial stability; 4) successful and engaged parenting and attachment; and 5) healthy relationships.



Examples of supports and services across these domains include life skills groups addressing stress, anger management, parenting, budgeting, eviction prevention, and addictions; education and employment assistance; childcare; physical health services; and individual and family counselling and mental health services. Case managers play a critical role in assessing each young parent's individual needs and coordinating their access to supports. While a supportive housing program may not directly provide services relevant to each of these five core areas, all programs should facilitate tenants' access to additional supports by establishing collaborations and partnerships with other agencies and organizations in the community. Supportive housing programs are often more effective when teen parents' autonomy is respected and they drive decisions about supports and services (Desiderio et al., 2010).

While all supportive housing programs are characterized by the integration of housing and supports, housing arrangements and strategies for delivering services can vary by site (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2013). In a single site model of supportive housing, units are located within a single building, whereas a scattered site model describes units located across multiple buildings or properties. Depending on the housing arrangement and needs of the population targeted by the supportive housing program, supports and services may be provided on-site (common with a single site model), at a location in the community, or at the client's home by mobile case manager or team (common with a scattered site model).

A substantial body of literature, including seven randomized control trials, demonstrates that supportive housing programs are associated with reduced homelessness and greater housing stability (Rog et al., 2014). In addition, tenants consistently rate supportive housing more positively than other housing models. Researchers and evaluators have identified the tailored approach to service provision and respect for tenant choice inherent in the supportive housing model as important contributors to these positive perceptions. However, although mounting evidence recognizes supportive housing as a promising homelessness prevention approach, additional research is needed to elucidate the effective elements and outcomes for various subpopulations.

*“There’s a huge transformation you have to do. Going from a homeless drug addict to a parent is a pretty big change.”  
(Parent)*

Most studies investigating the implementation and outcomes of supportive housing have focused on single adults affected by mental illness, the population for whom these programs were originally developed (Gewirtz, 2007). Supportive housing programs specifically tailored to the needs of teen parents lack rigorous evaluation (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2011). Nonetheless, several recent studies of supportive housing programs serving pregnant and parenting teen mothers and homeless families suggest that providing teen families with stable housing and comprehensive support services can contribute to a range of positive impacts for parents and children (Lenz-Rashid, 2013).

The Second Chance Home Network (Hudgins, Erickson, & Walker, 2014), founded in Georgia in 2001 through collaboration between the state government and a non-profit organization, is an example of a supportive housing program for teen mothers that integrates the five core components identified by Desiderio et al. (2010). Findings from evaluations dating back to 2002 consistently demonstrate that the program helps teen mothers to continue their education, improve relationships with their families and their children's fathers, avoid additional teen pregnancies, and practice positive parenting and life skills (G-CAPP report; Hudgins, Erickson, & Walker, 2014). Tenants displayed significant improvements in several domains of parenting that indicate a lower risk of child abuse and neglect, including understanding the developmental capacities of children and sensitivity to children's needs. Evaluation findings also indicate that remaining in the program for a longer period of time is associated with better outcomes, especially pertaining to education, employment, and residential stability (Hudgins et al., 2014). Evidence from evaluations of the Second Chance Home Network supports the effectiveness of integrating supports to promote self-sufficiency, housing stability, financial stability, successful and engaged parenting and attachment, and healthy relationships into supportive housing programs serving pregnant and parenting teens (Hudgins et al., 2014).

*"No matter what struggles I am going through I can make sure my daughter does not know what is happening because all she knows is that she has a roof over her head and food in her stomach." (Parent)*

Studies of supportive housing programs for homeless families more broadly may also help to identify key components of supportive housing models for teen families. Pregnant and parenting teens may represent a particularly vulnerable subgroup of homeless families, but share many risk and protective factors with this larger population (Narendorf et al., 2016). In a recent review of four supportive housing programs for homeless pregnant and parenting women with addictions, researchers found that programs providing housing and additional supports were associated with significant improvements across many domains, including housing stability, mental and physical health for mothers and their children, engagement in supportive services, and mothers' self-efficacy (Krahn, Caine, Chaw-Kant, & Singh, 2018). Supportive housing programs were also associated with decreases in intimate partner violence and substance abuse. Evidence from another evaluation of a separate supportive housing program for homeless families indicates that participation in supportive housing programs can reduce the likelihood of re-entering the foster care system, suggesting that these interventions may help intervene in cycles of abuse and neglect (Lenz-Rashid, 2013). Researchers have identified case management and rapid rehousing strategies based on the Housing First approach as key components of supportive housing programs to meet the complex needs of homeless families (Lenz-Rashid, 2013; Narendorf et al., 2016).

Although our understanding of how to support families affected by homelessness is expanding, adolescent and homeless fathers remain an under-researched group (Narendorf et al., 2016). However, young fathers have unique needs for services and supports. Compared to young mothers, fathers have greater levels of risk indicators including substance abuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, and mental health challenges (Narendorf et al., 2016). While supportive housing programs that move tenants into stable housing quickly and with few demands may be appropriate for both teen mothers and fathers, fathers may require more intensive services and supports.

*“I want to raise my son to be respectful of women. I don’t want him to be someone who has to recover from his childhood. And I don’t want my son to grow up feeling misplaced, like he doesn’t know his place in the world.” (Parent)*



## Responding to the Issue: The Successful Families Program

This section provides a detailed overview of Successful Families as a program that responds to the need for supportive housing for teen families.

The Successful Families model is conceptualized using a socio-ecological approach to demonstrate how families are provided numerous levels of structural and relational supports that ‘wraparound’ them. The model positions **teen families** at the centre of a number of concentric circles (see Figure 1 below). The circle surrounding families indicates the **supports and services** that families receive, provided by Terra Centre HSS. These supports and services are situated within **affordable, safe, and secure housing** that is provided by Brentwood Community Development Group. At a more distal level sits the **partnership** between Terra Centre and Brentwood Community Development Group, which is vital to the success of the combined approach of providing supports and housing for teen families, and the **community connections** facilitated by Terra that link families to additional resources and families in the neighbourhood. The final outer circle represents the **integrated research and evaluation** that supports a culture of learning across the program.

The following six areas of the document highlight the model and are thus organized as: 1) Families, 2) Supports and Services, 3) Affordable, Safe and Secure Housing, 4) The Partnership, 5) Community Connections, and 6) Integrated Research and Evaluation.

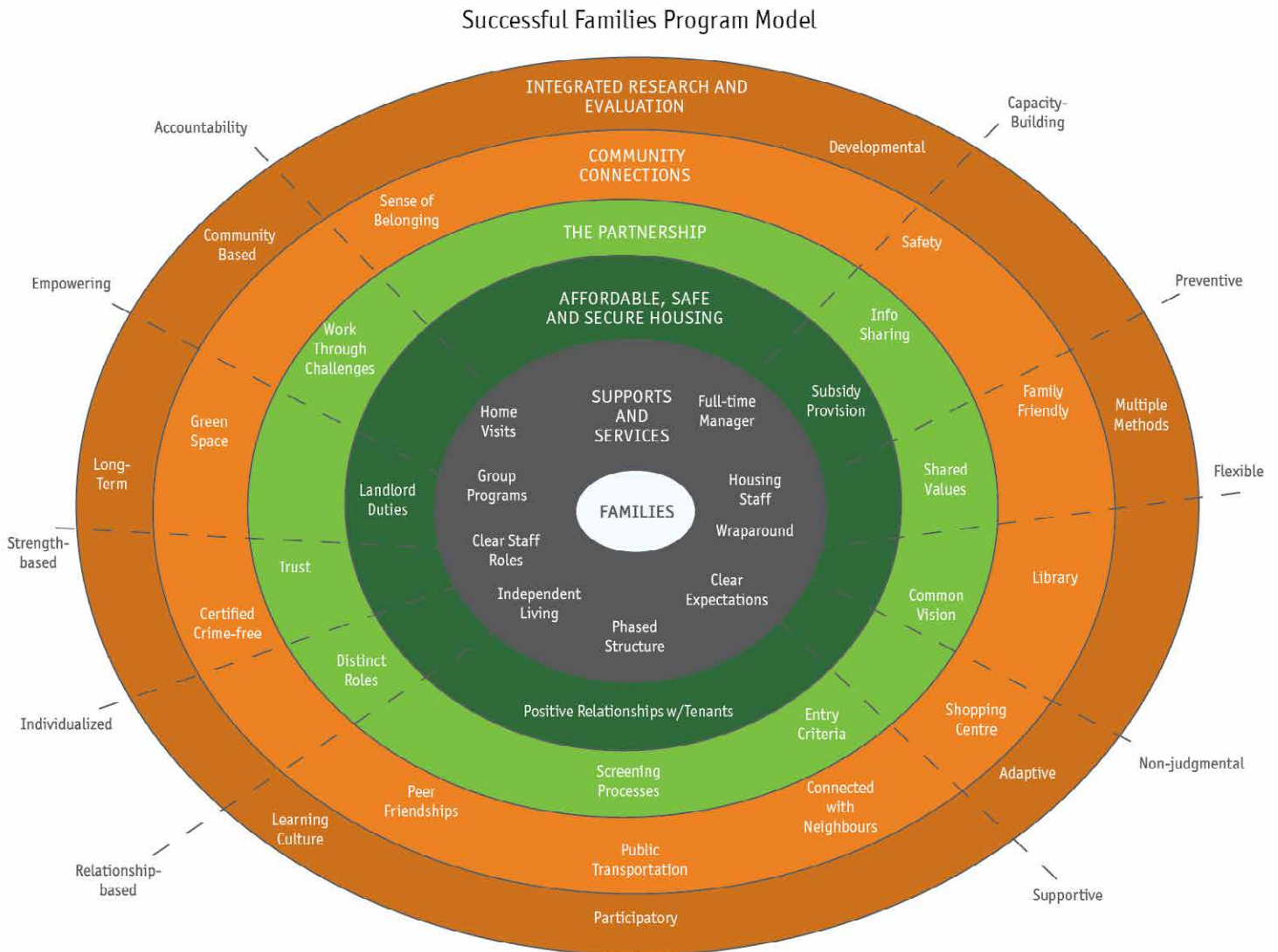


Figure 1. Successful Families program model



## FAMILIES

This section provides an overview of the teen families in Successful Families to gain a better understanding of the individuals served by the program and includes Demographics, Psychosocial and Child Development Factors, and Stories. The data for this portion derives from the Efforts to Outcomes program monitoring database, self-report questionnaires and child development assessments, and stories created by Terra HSS.

### Demographics

The demographics provided here are derived from program monitoring through the Efforts to Outcomes database. The Successful Families program has provided supportive housing to 63 families since its inception. Of these families, 24 have had an intimate partner living with them for a portion of time. Currently, there are 23 parents and 27 children actively involved in the program.<sup>1</sup> The age range of current parent participants is 18-24, with an average age of 20.8 years, and the age range of current child participants is 0-7, with an average age of 2.4 years. Sixty-eight percent of current families identify as Indigenous, 24% as Caucasian, 4% as African, and 2% as Spanish.

<sup>1</sup> This does not include partners who live on site but do not receive direct support from the program, participants who have moved out of the program and are receiving transitional support, and those who have been accepted into the program but have not yet moved in.

Table 1. Demographic information for Successful Families participants

# Families Served	Average Age	Ethnic Identity
63	Parents: 20.8 years	Indigenous: 68%
	Children: 2.4 years	Caucasian: 24%
		African: 4%
		Spanish: 2%

Fifteen current participants attend an educational program (e.g., high school, post-secondary), 4 participants have paid employment (full-time or part-time), 1 participant is on maternity leave, and 3 participants are not currently involved in a day program due to mental health challenges. With respect to participants' income sources, 9 participants receive funding from Learners Benefits to support high school completion, 5 receive funding from Alberta Supports (formerly Alberta Works), 4 participants are supported by their own income, 4 receive financial support through Child and Family Services, 2 receive student loans from the government, and 2 are currently in the process of seeking supports for financial independence.

Table 2. Income sources and day programs for Successful Families participants

Income Sources	Day Programs
Earned Income	Education: 15
Learners Benefits	Employment: 4
Alberta Supports	Maternity leave: 1
Child and Family Services	Not currently employed: 3
Student Loans	

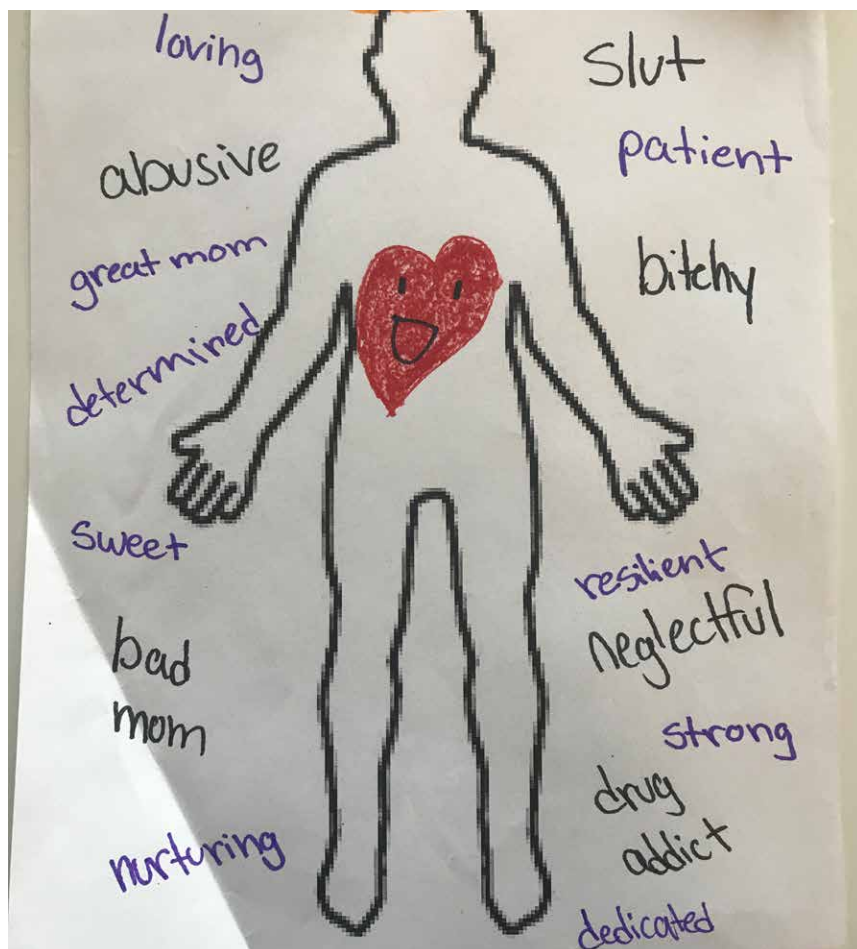
Throughout the life of the program, there have been 12 evictions, 18 planned moves, and 6 unplanned moves (i.e., leases were not renewed or families moved out on short notice).

### Psychosocial and Child Development Factors

A number of tools were used with program participants to further build an understanding of the families. These tools measured parents' self-esteem, resilience, parent-child relationships, parenting attitudes, child development, and children's neurocognitive functioning. A portion of participants completed each of the tools, with 19 parents completing self-report questionnaires and 18 children completing child development assessments.

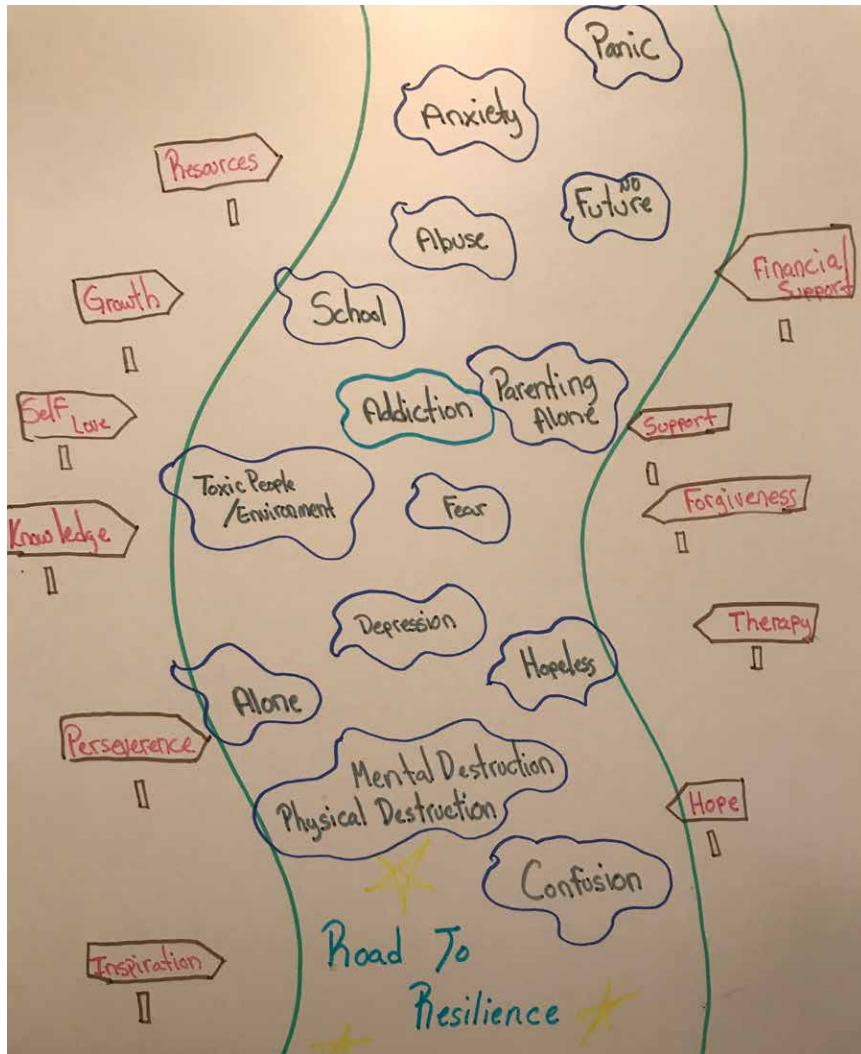






*"We hear these things all the time about how we're abusive and bad parents." (Parent)*

**Self-Esteem.** Researchers have not widely explored the concept of self-esteem in teen parents (Berry, Shillington, Peak, & Hohman, 2000). Successful Families participants' self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. On this scale, participants' average score was 20.8 out of a possible 40 points ( $n = 19$ ), with scores ranging between 15 and 28. Descriptive categories have not been established for this scale (e.g., what constitutes low versus high self-esteem). However, as a reference point, in a study of 18-19-year-old female Canadian high school students the average score on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was 29.04, and a score below 21 was deemed "very low self-esteem" (Bagley, Bolitho, & Bertrand, 1997). Eight out of 19 Successful Families participants' scores were below 21. Thus, results generally suggest that self-esteem is an area of difficulty for participants. This is not surprising in light of the challenging background histories and ongoing stigma that many participants reported, and is an important area for HSS to consider for further programming and support resources.



**Resilience.** Participants’ self-reported resilience was measured with the CD-RISC. Participants’ average score on this scale was 62.23, with scores ranging between 30 and 90 (n = 19). In the original validation study for the CD-RISC, the mean score for the general US population was 80.7 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This scale measures the capacity to effectively cope and adapt in the face of adversity. Self-esteem and resilience are highly correlated, with self-reported self-esteem being a predictor of self-reported resilience (Balgiu, 2017). Given participants’ relatively low overall score on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the low average score on the resilience scale may be expected, and represents an additional, potentially important area for Successful Families programming to target.

**Parent-Child Relationships.** The BASC-3 PRQ was used to assess Successful Families participants' perspectives on their relationships with their children. Scores on the BASC-3 PRQ are classified into three ranges, consisting of average (signifying a typical parent-child relationship), below average (indicating the presence of potential or developing relationship problems that should be monitored), and lower extreme (denoting significant relationship problems for which intervention may be warranted).

Twelve program participants completed the BASC-3 PRQ. A lower number of participants completed this scale compared to other questionnaires because the BASC-3 PRQ can only be administered to parents with children ages 2 and up. Figure 2 depicts the number of participants who scored in each classification range on the BASC-3 PRQ. Results show that the majority of participants who completed the BASC-3 PRQ are demonstrating typical attachment, discipline practices, involvement, parenting confidence, and relational frustration. An area of particular strength for participants is their involvement with their children.

Parenting confidence and relational frustration represent potential areas for improvement for some participants, and could be an important area to focus on in programming (for example, during Successful Families groups). In addition, some participants were particularly strong in certain areas, reflected by higher scores within and across scales, and it might be possible for these participants to act as peer mentors to participants who are struggling with certain aspects of parenting. Overall, results reflect that, for the 12 participants who completed the BASC-3 PRQ, teen parent-child relationships are typical, with evident areas of strength. See Figure 2 for a depiction of BASC-3 scores.

*"I try my best to be a fun mom. The way we have fun is we listen to music and dance and eat snacks together on the kitchen floor. We laugh together and have mother and son moments. That's when my son is most affectionate and expresses his love for me." (Parent)*

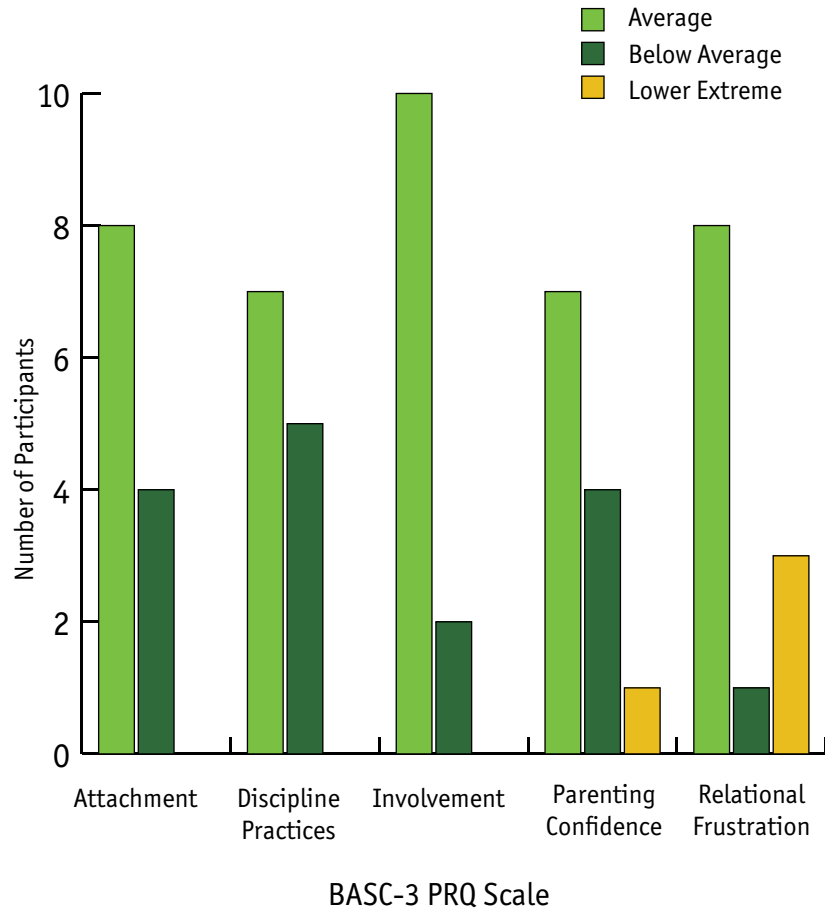


Figure 2. Classification of Successful Families participant scores on the BASC-3 PRQ

**Parenting Attitudes.** The AAPI-2 was used to assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of Successful Families participants. Nineteen participants completed the AAPI-2. Results are organized into five constructs (Oppressing Power and Independence, Role Reversal, Corporal Punishment, Lack of Empathic Awareness, Inappropriate Parental Expectations) that serve as the basis for assessing attitudes known to contribute to child abuse and neglect, as well as levels of risk (low, medium, high) for abusive and neglectful parenting practices. Figure 3 shows the number of participants who scored in each classification range for the five constructs of the AAPI-2.

On the Oppressing Power and Independence construct, 19 out of 20 participants scored in the medium risk range, and one participant scored in the low risk range. This construct reflects the attitude that obedience and complete compliance to parental authority should be demanded, and that children should not be permitted to challenge, but rather should do what they are told without question. It is possible that, for some participants, awareness of the stereotypes surrounding teen parenting (for example, their children being disobedient, frequently “acting up”) may lead to fears about their children’s disobedience, and therefore lead parents to lean toward oppressing power and independence rather than risk their children displaying disobedience.

With respect to the Role Reversal Scale, the majority (n = 13) of participants fell into the medium risk range, 4 participants were in the high risk range, and 2 participants were in the low risk range. This scale measures the tendency to reverse parent and child roles, such that children are expected to be sensitive to and responsible for their parents’ happiness and parents look to their children for care and comfort.

On the Belief in Corporal Punishment scale, most participants again fell in the medium risk range (n = 14), with 3 participants in the high risk range and 2 participants in the low risk range. The rationale for using corporal punishment is often to teach children right from wrong, and parents who believe in and value the use of corporal punishment might benefit from education regarding the potential risks of corporal punishment and benefits of positive reinforcement for shaping children’s behaviour (Bavolek & Keene, 2010).

On the Lack of Empathic Awareness scale, 11 participants fell in the medium risk range, while 8 participants fell in the high risk range. Parents who lack empathic awareness of their children’s needs may experience their children’s needs and desires as irritating and overwhelming, and the needs of the child may come into direct conflict with the needs of the parent. Given that teen parents are navigating their own developmental processes and needs, it is understandable that they may struggle to develop a high level of empathic awareness for their children’s needs.



*“This picture represents that, as young mothers, we’re often worried about what people think about us when they hear our kids screaming. You know how kids are, they’re loud. I think subconsciously, we’re always worried about what the neighbours think. And then you’re just always policing your child’s behaviour in a way so that no one can call social services.... Sometimes I feel like I’m under surveillance from my neighbours, like they could call children’s services at any time.”  
(Parent)*

Finally, on the Inappropriate Parental Expectations scale, 18 participants fell in the medium risk range and 1 participant fell in the low risk range. Inappropriate parental expectations may stem from an inaccurate perception of children’s skills and abilities. Parents may therefore benefit from education regarding the needs and capabilities of children at various stages of growth and development.

Overall, most parents fell into the medium risk range with respect to the parenting attitudes measured by the AAPI-2. Of note, few parents fell into the high-risk range on most scales, suggesting that most participants have the foundation for successful parenting. Results of the AAPI-2 are useful in considering a number of areas in which participants might benefit from expanding their knowledge and awareness. See Figure 3 for a depiction of AAPI-2 scores.

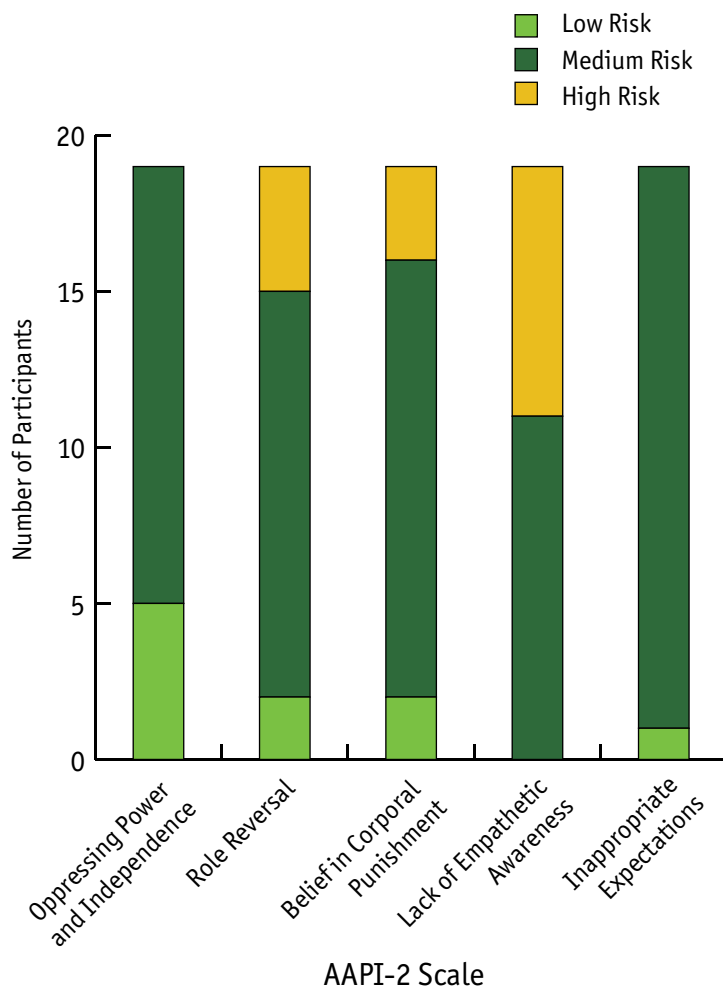


Figure 3. Classification of Successful Families participant scores on the AAPI-2



**Child Development.** The Bayley-III was used to assess the developmental functioning of Successful Families participants' children between the ages of 1 and 42 months. There are five developmental domains measured by the Bayley-III, consisting of Cognitive, Language, Motor, Social-Emotional, and Adaptive Skills. Across each of these developmental domains, average scores were at the expected level. This suggests that, for the children of participants who were assessed with the Bayley-III, their developmental trajectory is typical overall. Table 3 presents the average standard scores for the children of the Successful Families participants.



Table 3. Average Bayley-III scores for the children of Successful Families participants

Developmental Domain	Average Standard Score	Classification Range
Cognitive	100 (n =13)	At Expected Level
Language	92 (n =11)	At Expected Level
Motor	106 (n =13)	At Expected Level
Social-Emotional	91 (n =9)	At Expected Level
Adaptive Skills	100 (n =9)	At Expected Level

**Children’s Neurocognitive Functioning.** The NEPSY-II was used to assess the neurocognitive functioning of Successful Families participants’ children ages 4 and up. Four domains are measured by the NEPSY-II, consisting of Language, Memory and Learning, Sensorimotor, and Visuospatial. Within these domains are 11 subtests, and participants’ average scores on each of these subtests are depicted in Table 4. On 7 of the 11 subtests, participants’ average scores were at the expected level, and participants’ average scores were slightly below the expected level on 4 of the 11 subtests. It is not possible to directly compare the results of the Bayley-III and NEPSY-II because each of these tests measures different constructs. In addition, sample sizes for both tests were small, particularly for the NEPSY-II. In general, however, across both the Bayley-III and NEPSY-II, it appears that the children of teen parents are developing on a fairly typical trajectory, with areas of strength and weakness.

*“This is my son and I enjoying a trail by our house on one of the first hot summer days. It’s nice to live near a place where we have the ability to enjoy nature in the city. My son loves to run around and be wild so it’s the perfect place to let him explore.”  
(Parent)*



Overall, the profile of participants' developmental domains appears consistent with that of the general population, in that some children are above the expected level in certain areas, some children are below the expected level in certain areas, and most children are at the expected level in most areas. This is an important finding given the stigmas surrounding teen parents and the widespread assumption that the children of teen parents may lag behind their peers developmentally.

Table 4. Average NEPSY-II scores for the children of Successful Families participants

Developmental Domain	Subtest	Average Subtest Scaled Score <sup>2</sup>	Classification Range
Language	Body Part Naming	85 (n =5)	Slightly Below Expected
	Comprehension of Instructions	90 (n =5)	At Expected
	Phonological Awareness	80 (n =5)	Slightly Below Expected
	Speeded Naming	100 (n =4)	At Expected
	Word Generation	95 (n =4)	At Expected
Memory and Learning	Narrative Memory	80 (n =5)	Slightly Below Expected
	Sentence Repetition	85 (n =5)	Slightly Below Expected
Sensorimotor	Imitating Hand Positions	90 (n =5)	At Expected
	Visuomotor Precision	90 (n =5)	At Expected
Visuospatial	Block Construction	105 (n =5)	At Expected
	Design Copying	90 (n =5)	At Expected

<sup>2</sup>\*NEPSY-II standard scores were converted to scaled scores in order to maintain consistency with reporting of the Bayley-III.

## Stories

This section contains four fictionalized stories written by HSS and based on real families in the program to give meaning to the demographics and psychosocial and child development factors. They also further demonstrate the heterogeneity of families in the program.

### Betty

*Age: 22*

*Day program: Self-employed*

*Ethnicity/Background:  
Caucasian*

*Primary income: Employment*

*Duration in program: 3 years*

Betty came to the Successful Families program right at the beginning of the program. She and her partner were struggling to make ends meet and Betty needed increased supports nearby. They had two children together, and their oldest child had special needs that required multiple surgeries, behavioural supports, and strong advocacy for inclusion in daycare. The Successful Families program provided Betty the supports she needed to build her own confidence as a parent, access mental health services that work for her, advocate for her son, and reach financial independence.

Betty's biggest learning in the Successful Families program was that she could develop community. When Betty moved into the program, she had a hard time seeing herself connecting with other participants. She was one of the few parents in a long-term relationship, and she didn't see her challenges as similar to the others. The longer Betty stayed in the program, the further she thought she was getting from the other parents. However, through frequently attending groups, and taking on opportunities for leadership, this started to change. She slowly realized that she had integrated herself into the community, and felt more belonging. She began to spend evenings with other young parents, share babysitters, and plan weekend nights out together.

This experience led Betty to open her own day home, allowing her to support other young parents in the program with much needed childcare, and supported her own journey to financial independence. Betty went on to become the first Successful Families graduate, and has given back to the community in multiple ways.

## Jane

<i>Age: 20</i>	<i>Primary income: AISH (Assured</i>
<i>Ethnicity/Background:</i>	<i>Income for the Severely</i>
<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Handicapped)</i>
<i>Day program: None</i>	<i>Duration in program: 1 year</i>

Jane and her family came to the Successful Families program because she and her partner were living in an expensive one-bedroom apartment with their young son sharing a room with them. The family struggled to pay rent, bills, and get groceries. Jane's partner was working part time in the late hours of the night. Jane stayed home with their young son, as she did not qualify for EI.

When the family first moved in, Jane struggled with her neighbour, who would play loud music late into the evening. The neighbour would complain to the landlord about Jane's son being loud. Jane and her neighbour put in complaints to Brentwood and to the police. Jane, with the support of the Successful Families team, scheduled mediation with her neighbour to work on resolving the issue.

In the past, Jane's anxiety has prevented her from going places alone. However, since being in the Woodcroft community, she has been going to the grocery store alone and has been able to take her children to a park in the community without her partner.

Due to her anxiety, Jane has also found it difficult to attend the Successful Families group programming.

Jane and her worker have come up with a plan where Jane will teach a beading class at the Terra House during the summer.

## Daniel

<i>Age: 19</i>	<i>Primary income: Alberta</i>
<i>Ethnicity/Background:</i>	<i>Supports</i>
<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Duration in program: Six</i>
<i>Day program: Seeking</i>	<i>months</i>
<i>employment</i>	

Daniel came to Terra seeking assistance as a single father with a Temporary Guardianship Order for his daughter and sole custody. He has worked hard trying to find adequate housing and joined the Successful Families program six months ago.

Over the months, some of his challenges have been trying to find stable child-care for his daughter so he could find and maintain employment, as well as continue with legal matters, which he has been diligent about. His family are not a consistently reliable option for him and his daughter.

Another challenge has involved navigating being a single dad in the community; however, he has tried to be a positive role model for dads in similar situations. He continues to make every effort to maintain his housing, have a safe space for his daughter with childcare, and find employment that draws on the skills he has in the construction industry.

He shows a dedication to his daughter that is unmatched and continues to give her every opportunity to have a healthy active childhood by making sure she has what she needs in a safe and caring environment.

## Falula

*Age: 19*

*Ethnicity/Background:*

*Indigenous*

*Day program: Seeking employment*

*Primary income: Child and*

*Family Services*

*Duration in program: 12 months*

Falula and her daughter joined the Successful Families program because they were living in an apartment with poor living conditions and that was pest ridden. Falula was a young, single parent who was going to school and getting very little sleep because of her living conditions. By the time she left the apartment for Successful Families she was hardly spending any time there.

Falula's move into Brentwood came with a number of challenges that made settling down into the community difficult. However, she worked hard to integrate into the community and leaned on her supports to get through these substantial challenges.

She managed to build positive relationships with neighbours, other participants in the community, and Terra staff.

Falula has consistently managed to meet and exceed her monthly expectations and has been instrumental in encouraging other participants to participate in groups. As a result, the number of families participating in Successful Families groups has increased. Since recently graduating high school, Falula's goal is to get a job so she can look after herself and child.

## SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

This area outlines the supports and services that Terra provides as part of the Successful Families supportive housing program. As such, it highlights the staffing structure and approach, the philosophical foundation of these supports, the supports themselves, and the program requirements and participant process. The data for this portion derives predominantly from individual interviews and focus groups with staff, participant observation, and the participant survey.

### Staffing Structure and Approach

**Housing Team Composition and Location.** The Terra housing team is comprised of three HSS workers and one housing manager. The team is located directly opposite the Brentwood family units in a house purchased by Brentwood Community Development Group. The “Terra House,” as it is known, is provided to Terra free of charge and acts as office space and an area in which to facilitate groups. The space has a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and spare rooms for storage on the main floor. The basement has been converted into a childcare space. Upstairs, there is a large open space that is used for educational groups, and three bedrooms that have been converted into offices and a private meeting room. As a result of having this space, HSS can provide **onsite support** and are easily accessible for organized home visits and impromptu meetings.

Each HSS worker has a caseload of up to 10 families at any one time. Given the complex work that Successful Families staff engages in with participants, a **full-time, on-site manager** is required to adequately meet the supervision needs of staff, sustain the Terra-Brentwood partnership, and add elements of structure to the program. This was particularly important during the formative stages of the program development.

*“... having somebody that’s physically here and, like, mentally, emotionally here for us as well...so [staff] know where they’re supposed to be and [the housing manager] can sort of lead them there.”  
(Terra Housing Support Staff)*



**Staff Orientation and Training.** When HSS start their positions, they are provided an orientation manual and attend training that covers a range of topics including first aid, Health for Two, and relationship-based support. Housing support staff are, however, already ‘on the job’ while they are being trained. This limits the time they have to learn what their role entails before starting. In general, it takes approximately six months for staff to fully understand the work and how it fits into the bigger agency picture, for example, how it aligns with and is distinct from outreach and educational support.

The onsite housing manager provides guidance to HSS in how to apply theoretical concepts such as “strengths-based” supports and “wraparound” principles in practice. This helps to create an environment of continuous learning for staff and one in which they can grow into their positions over time.

**Collaborative Service Delivery.** Some of the Successful Families participants have several Terra workers that support different areas of their lives, such as outreach, educational support, and housing support. To coordinate all of these supports and develop a comprehensive, individualized plan for each participant, an integrated service approach is practiced at an agency level. This involves having quarterly integrated service team meetings, where the young parent and all professionals involved with the family come together for goal planning as well as for clarifying roles and responsibilities.

To discuss the best ways to support participants across the various programs, unit review meetings are held each month and attended by HSS and outreach staff. With a constantly changing environment requiring quick responses and adaptation, these meetings provide a structured space to keep all staff members aware and up-to-date. Currently, SEA do not attend these meetings, but this is viewed as an area of possible change moving forward to open these lines of communication. In addition to these more formal processes, HSS, outreach staff, and SEA send emails to inform one another about critical incidents that have occurred with their participants.

*“I feel like [our training] could go into more depth [when we first start our jobs].... [During] my [university] degree we didn’t really talk about in-home visitation, or even relationship building. Really, I just had to figure that out on my own.” (Terra Housing Support Staff)*

*“... We’re working with people in a moving machine...” (Terra Outreach worker)*

Further to collaborating internally, Terra also adopts a broader collaborative services delivery approach to working with families by collaborating with agencies across Edmonton to create individualized plans that are tailored to a range of complex needs. The C5 is a collaborative between five leading agencies in Edmonton – Terra Centre, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, Boyle Street Community Services, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, and Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre – that works to overcome systemic barriers for families living in poverty using their collective experience in service delivery. The C5 collaborate on specific initiatives, such as the [Relentless Connector](#) and [Ubuntu](#), where collective action can achieve stronger outcomes for families and communities than if agencies were working alone. The C5 also provides a collective voice to inform and influence social policy and act as a sounding board for decision makers in all levels of government.



*“I’ve had the opportunity to sit at the Relentless Connector table...to see the collaboration that happens there with Alberta [Supports] and Children Services. And Ubuntu, the collaborative services delivery between C5 and Children Services, has also just been so great. That whole collaborative services model is helping our families.... It is really about trying to build not only the professional supports but also the natural supports as well, so it’s really about bringing as many people to the table to plan for families to ensure that there are less gaps happening and that communication is stronger.” (Terra Housing Support Staff)*

## Philosophical Foundation

The Successful Families program uses the Ten Principles of Wraparound (Bruns et al., 2008) to guide the supports and services provided to families. As such, the supports are characterized by the principles shown in Figure 4 and explained below (taken from Bruns et al., 2008):

1. **Family Voice and Choice:** Family and youth/child perspectives are intentionally elicited and prioritized during all phases of the wraparound process. Planning is grounded in family members' perspectives, and the team strives to provide options and choices such that the plan reflects family values and preferences.
2. **Team Based:** The wraparound team consists of individuals agreed upon by the family and committed to the family through informal, formal, and community support and service relationships.
3. **Natural Supports:** The team actively seeks out and encourages the full participation of team members drawn from family members' networks of interpersonal and community relationships. The wraparound plan reflects activities and interventions that draw on sources of natural support.
4. **Collaboration:** Team members work cooperatively and share responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a single wraparound plan. The plan reflects a blending of team members' perspectives, mandates, and resources. The plan guides and coordinates each team member's work towards meeting the team's goals.
5. **Community-based:** The wraparound team implements service and support strategies that take place in the most inclusive, most responsive, most accessible, and least restrictive settings possible; and that safely promote child and family integration into home and community life.

6. **Culturally competent:** The wraparound process demonstrates respect for and builds on the values, preferences, beliefs, culture, and identity of the child/youth and family, and their community.
7. **Individualized:** To achieve the goals laid out in the wraparound plan, the team develops and implements a customized set of strategies, supports, and services.
8. **Strengths-Based:** The wraparound process and the wraparound plan identify, build on, and enhance the capabilities, knowledge, skills, and assets of the child and family, their community, and other team members.
9. **Unconditional:** A wraparound team does not give up on, blame, or reject children, youth, and their families. When faced with challenges or setbacks, the team continues working towards meeting the needs of the youth and family and towards achieving the goals in the wraparound plan until the team reaches agreement that a formal wraparound process is no longer necessary.
10. **Outcome Based:** The team ties the goals and strategies of the wraparound plan to observable or measurable indicators of success, monitors progress in terms of these indicators, and revises the plan accordingly.



*“I didn’t like it in the hospital. Their questions felt judgmental. It wasn’t like, ‘Congratulations!’ It was like, ‘Do you have somewhere safe to go?’ And ‘We’re gonna drug test you real quick.’” (Parent)*



Figure 4. Wraparound principles

In terms of the **strengths-based** principle, the Successful Families program focuses on the strengths of families rather than focusing on deficits. This is particularly important for teen families who generally experience a great degree of social stigma in their daily lives.

A strengths-based approach views parents as resourceful and resilient rather than focusing on the limitations they face. This approach also positions teen parenting in a positive light rather than as something to be prevented. It is, however, essential that a strengths-based approach does not discount the array of **interconnected structural barriers** that differentially impact families. As such, the program reflects a holistic understanding of the ways families are situated within larger cultural, social, economic and political systems that shape their everyday experiences.

In order to adequately support participants, it is necessary to develop strong relationships with families. **Strong relationships** facilitate the ability to use an **individualized wraparound approach** in the work with families. This involves operating from an understanding that a uniform definition of success cannot be applied across participants, but rather that all participants have different capacities and require staff to 'meet them where they are at'. In this way, HSS adopt a **flexible approach** in their work with families. This must be balanced with the need to **communicate clear expectations to participants**, including the need for participants to demonstrate **accountability** to program expectations.

The Successful Families program is built on a philosophy of **empowerment**, which encourages a gradual progression towards independence. In this vein, there is a need to achieve a balance between **supporting participants and building their capacity for independence**. 'Crisis' – that is, acute emotional distress in response to an event or chain of events – can be a regular occurrence for some teen families. For staff working with these families, being in constant response to crises takes away from the use of a strengths-based approach and from capacity building. In addition, an organization like Terra is not equipped for crisis response because they do not have the necessary supports, on-call staff, or adequate crisis procedures. It is therefore important for staff to **establish and maintain boundaries with participants**, and to incorporate a **focus on prevention** into their work with participants, while trusting that other organizations that are set up to respond to crisis can step in when needed.

"It was kind of like a constant crisis piece...I went a little overboard in sort of doing things for [participants] instead of doing things with them...it's not serving them in the long-term if they don't know how to do the things I was doing for them, like when they need to call their [income subsidy program] worker to keep getting funding because they've got mental health concerns...instead of letting them take responsibility for that. Which just enabled them to keep living how they're living because they'd just know that I'd be there to just pick up the pieces." (Terra Housing Support Staff)



*"If you live here, you need to make sure you're living a clean lifestyle, you're not partying, your parenting is up to par, you're not rowdy. People who aren't responsible don't last here. It gives people who might not know how to live responsibly the opportunity to learn. If you don't come from a stable background, you might not know how to live that way, but having rules can help. Anyone who wants to change their life can change their life. That's the good thing about living here. People who live here are in a more stable place."  
(Parent)*



To avoid falling into a crisis response mode, HSS are encouraged to assess the level of support needed in different situations by considering the idea of “do with, do for, cheer on” from the ten principles of wraparound support. A framework such as this helps to move participants towards independence and rely less on staff. By the time parents enter the Successful Families program, they have demonstrated the ability to work with support staff in a “do with” and “cheer on” capacity.

**“Do for”** – greatest level of support – doing something for a participant

**“Do with”** – medium level of support – accompanying a participant

**“Cheer on”** – lowest level of support – providing verbal support and instruction

## **Supports**

Housing support staff provide a wide range of instrumental and relational supports to participants with the intention of supporting participants towards independence. As mentioned, the relationships between the HSS workers and the families are crucial for creating a foundation upon which to provide meaningful supports.

To work towards a goal of independence with participants, supports focus on eviction prevention education, child development information, teaching and modelling parenting skills, teaching independent living skills, discussions about healthy relationships, goal planning, crisis planning, and community referrals. The breadth of support involved reflects an acknowledgment that preventing homelessness and promoting positive outcomes is not simply a matter of ensuring teen families have a roof over their heads. Rather, multi-pronged wraparound supports that address the complex and diverse needs of teen families are required to ensure meaningful, lasting impact. Support falls into two areas and is carried out on an ongoing basis: 1) Individual Supports, and 2) Group Supports.

*“Isabelle (child) and Pam (HSS worker) are really close and it’s amazing seeing their relationship. Isabelle really likes Pam. Well actually I think Isabelle loves Pam.”  
(Parent)*

**Individual Supports.** Individual support is provided to participants in the form of home visits. Housing support staff begin providing support and guidance before participants enter the program. Potential participants complete an application and provide three references so that Terra and Brentwood can get a sense of families' current circumstances in terms of finances, housing, and their abilities to navigate the challenges in their lives. Following the application stage, potential participants have an intake meeting with their existing Terra worker (e.g., outreach staff or ESS), the housing manager, and their future HSS worker to determine readiness. During this process, participants are asked a set of interview questions, and information is provided regarding program requirements and lease agreements so that expectations are clear.

Upon program entry, support and guidance around eviction prevention, independent living, and life skills are provided (e.g., how to use appliances, cook nutritious meals, clean, shop, understand bus routes). Additionally, HSS assist participants over time to understand lease expectations. Participants are also assisted with other logistical details such as securing the availability of funds for their damage deposit and rent, arranging utility accounts, and acquiring items required for independent living such as basic furnishings. Participants are also assisted with budgeting and financial management. For example, tax clinics are hosted annually in March during which volunteer accountants work with participants at the Terra House to file their taxes and ensure they have their Notice of Assessments for the following year of subsidy. In addition to providing support for eviction prevention and life skills, HSS provide individual support for participants in the form of hands-on teaching, modelling, and support for parenting strategies, as well as child attachment, safety, routines, and health. Workers also engage in goal planning with participants based on an assessment of strengths and needs.



*“What I like is an equal balance of the support and recognition that you’re an individual figuring out stuff yourself. Support is really important as long as it’s not overbearing. I like knowing they’re there to answer questions...”*  
(Parent)

**Group Supports.** Participants also access group support, and are expected to attend at least two groups per month when they first enter the program (see Program Requirements and Participant Process). Educational groups help young parents to build their skills as parents and individuals, and focus on such topics as cooking and healthy relationships. Parents are made aware of the various groups available to them via a newsletter, a calendar posted in the house, and social media.

A curriculum has been built to provide structure for the educational groups provided by HSS. There are six learning modules that cover healthy relationships, getting to know your neighbourhood, kitchen basics, managing money, successful housing, and valuing time.

Modules and expected outcomes:

- **Healthy relationships – Parts 1, 2 & 3**
  - Healthy relationships and connection with the community
  - Meaningful social connections
  - Identify and access social support networks
- **Getting to know your neighbourhood**
  - Identify community supports
  - Understand how and where to access social supports
  - Understand how and where to access community resources
  - Develop a sense of belonging in the community
- **Kitchen basics**
  - Gain basic nutrition knowledge
  - Practice safe food handling
  - Explore practical money saving tips

*“Tracy (HSS) is really helpful with parenting and child development stuff. I’ve taken her advice more than once.”  
(Parent)*

*“I’d really like to have groups here that focus on knowledge about leases, moving in, our laws and rights, what’s expected of us as tenants, maybe some legal advice.”  
(Parent)*

- **Managing my money**
  - Participants develop capacity to manage their finances
  - Help participants understand their relationships with money and how this affects an individual's financial behaviour
  - Learn new strategies to support sound money management
  - Understand how and where to access financial resources
  - Reduce stress related to personal finances
- **Movin' on up!**
  - Participants complete their educational path
  - Participants explore career options
- **Successful housing**
  - Understand the rights and responsibilities of being a tenant
  - Understand the rights and responsibilities of a landlord
  - Identify strategies to create a sense of belonging and home
- **Valuing time**
  - Develop organizational skills for daily living
  - Reduce personal/parental stress

*"...we went off topic [during the group] last week, but at least they were able to connect and build relationships."  
(Terra Housing Support Staff)*

Participants can also access additional programs in the community, such as library programs and church gatherings. This helps young families to build social support networks and familiarize themselves with community resources and programs. The families also attend celebrations and events as well as planned community outings. In addition to the groups available, parents have expressed that they would like groups focused on housing and tenancy guidelines, building relationships with neighbours, gardening, and to be provided with more information on developmental milestones for their children.

Housing support staff find it difficult to find the balance between making groups productive and learning-focused and leaving space for connection. As a result, they err on the side of flexibility and generally allow participants to determine the flow and pace of the groups.

**Program Requirements and Participant Process**

Figure 5 is a document provided to Successful Families staff and participants to illustrate the journey participants move through from program entry to completion. Two major elements of this journey, the program entry and the phased approach, are described in more detail below.

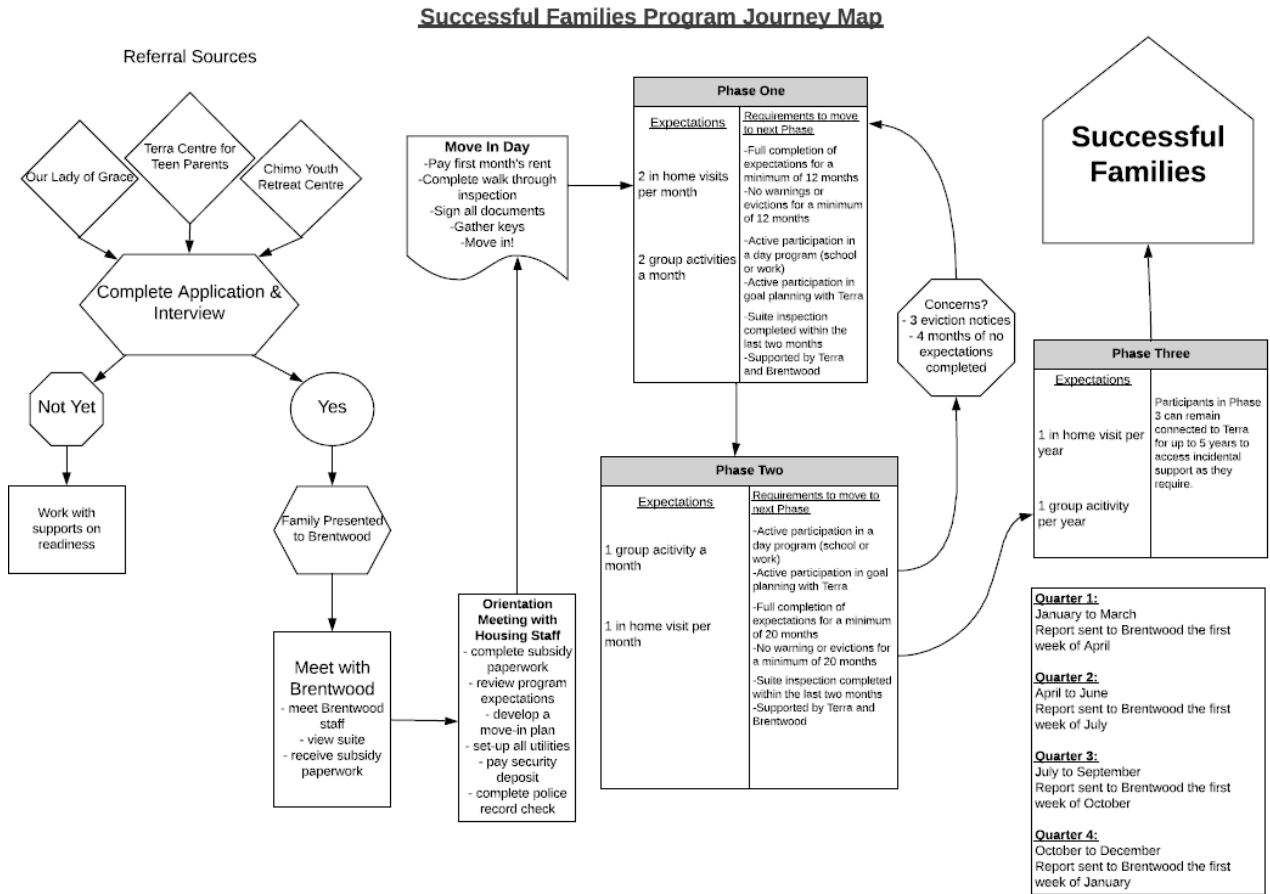


Figure 5. Successful Families program journey map

**Program entry.** Terra staff members (such as outreach staff and ESS) refer families to the Successful Families program. Participants must be linked with a Terra staff member for a minimum of six months before applying to the program. This allows staff members to have a sufficient understanding of the readiness and needs of any given participant so that they may provide participants with a letter of reference. Terra staff members external to the program have access to a workbook that they can review with participants and that introduces the expectations and responsibilities of participants in the program. After being referred to the program, families complete an application form, budget planning tool, and provide their most recent tax Notice of Assessment, letters of advocacy from referral sources, letters confirming school registration and/or financial funding or employment as applicable, as well as consent for Brentwood to release information to Terra.

After the application package is received, participants complete an interview with the Terra housing manager and the HSS worker who will be assigned to their case should their application be successful. The participant's existing Terra worker (e.g., outreach staff or ESS) is also present at the interview. Based on the application package and interview process, Successful Families staff members determine whether a family meets program requirements; primarily, whether they have adequate income and/or funding to pay their rent and whether their independent living skills are sufficient so as to be suitable for the program. If it is determined that a family does not yet meet program requirements, HSS, in collaboration with the participant's existing Terra worker, can provide feedback to the participant regarding areas that they can work on in order to meet program requirements. The Terra worker can provide supports to participants to enhance their readiness. If a participant is determined to be ready for the program, the housing manager presents the family's case to Brentwood at a bi-weekly Operations meeting and a final decision is made as to whether the family will be accepted into the program at that time.

Once accepted into the program, participants attend an orientation meeting with their HSS worker. They are also provided with a brief booklet that outlines how to report maintenance problems, explains heating, electrical, and water issues, and outlines general expectations regarding health and safety. By the day of move-in, participants are required to provide their damage deposit, a minimum of half of a first month's rent, photo ID, and an email confirmation from their HSS that the orientation meeting has taken place.

**Phased approach.** The Successful Families program uses a phased approach (outlined in Table 5) to support participants during their time in the program, and this approach has evolved over time with evaluative feedback. Participants enter the program in **Phase 1**, which requires two in-home visits and attendance at two group activities per month. In order to move on from Phase 1, participants must complete their expectations, have received no warning or eviction notices for a minimum of 15 months (although these do not need to be consecutive months), and have received a suite inspection within the last two months. In **Phase 2**, participants are required to complete one in-home visit and to participate in one group activity per month. Moving on from Phase 2 requires completion of expectations, no warning or eviction notices for a minimum of 20 months (again, these do not need to be consecutive months), and completion of a suite inspection for the last two months.

In both Phase 1 and 2, participants are required to actively participate in a day program, actively engage in goal planning with their Terra support staff, and to more generally be accessing support from Terra and Brentwood. If a Phase 2 participant receives three eviction notices and/or has four months without expectations completed, they are required to return to Phase 1 requirements. Finally, **Phase 3** participants are required to complete one in-home visit and one group activity per year and can remain connected to Terra for up to five years to access incidental support as required. Currently in the program, there are 16 families in Phase 1, 4 families in Phase 2, and 3 families in Phase 3.



*“The most important part of this program for me is stabilization and integration in the community. Stabilization, not just of housing, but of routine. So you need to come to group, have a day program, pay your bills. Also, finding and networking other resources which could include other moms in the complex, to get a hold of your sanity again and give the kids someone to play with. That’s the most important part for me.” (Parent)*



Table 5. Successful Families program phased approach to supporting participants

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
2 in-home visits per month	1 in-home visit per month	1 in-home visit per year
2 group activities per month	1 group activities per month	1 group activities per year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full completion of expectations for a minimum of 15 months</li> <li>• No warning or eviction notices for a minimum of 15 months</li> <li>• Active participation in a day program</li> <li>• Active participation in goal planning with Terra</li> <li>• Suite inspection completed within the last two months</li> <li>• Supported by Terra and Brentwood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full completion of expectations for a minimum of 20 months</li> <li>• No warning or eviction notices for a minimum of 20 months</li> <li>• Active participation in a day program</li> <li>• Active participation in goal planning with Terra</li> <li>• Suite inspection completed within the last two months</li> <li>• Supported by Terra and Brentwood</li> </ul> <p>Return to Phase 1 if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 eviction notices</li> <li>• 4 months of no expectations completed</li> </ul>	<p>Participants in phase 3 can remain connected to Terra for up to 5 years to access incidental support as they require.</p>

Parents were asked to provide feedback about their experiences of the supports and services provided through the Successful Families program in a participant survey. The number of participants who indicated varying levels of agreement with Successful Families survey items is depicted in Figure 6.

Most participants strongly agreed or agreed that, as a result of being part of the program, they:

- Felt less stress about being a parent
- Knew how to access community resources and programs
- Felt as though they were part of a community
- Had relationships with other participants
- Could better afford their monthly rent
- Knew how to be a good tenant
- Were a more confident parent
- Felt safe in the place that they live.

Items with the highest proportion of neutral responses and/or disagreement related to feeling a part of the community and having relationships with other tenants. Given that many participants responded to the survey early on in their involvement with the program, it is possible that these aspects of the program had not yet been fully experienced for these participants at the time of responses, and that these aspects take longer for individual participants to develop. It will therefore be important for the program to pay particular attention to nurturing a sense of community and developing relationships with other participants as part of program delivery.

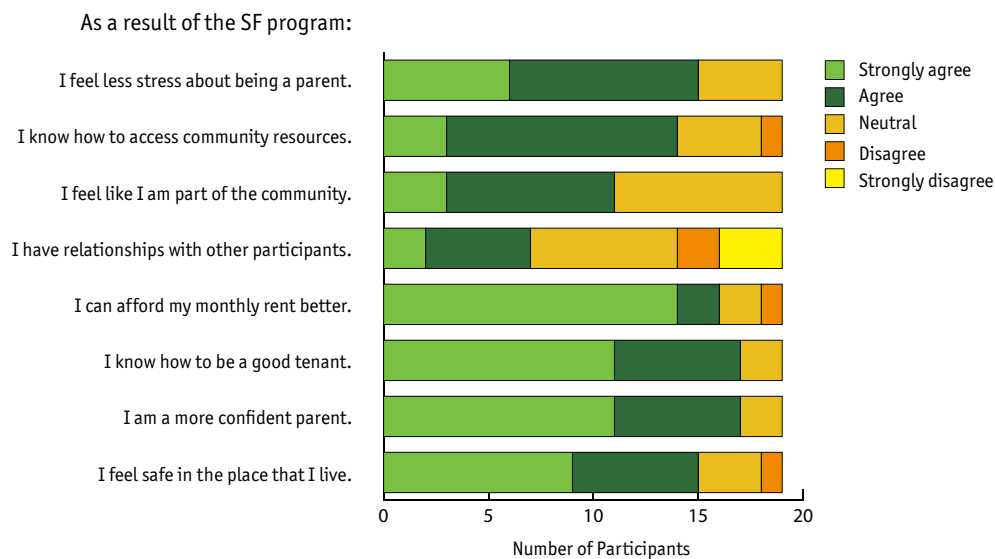


Figure 6. Successful Families participant survey responses

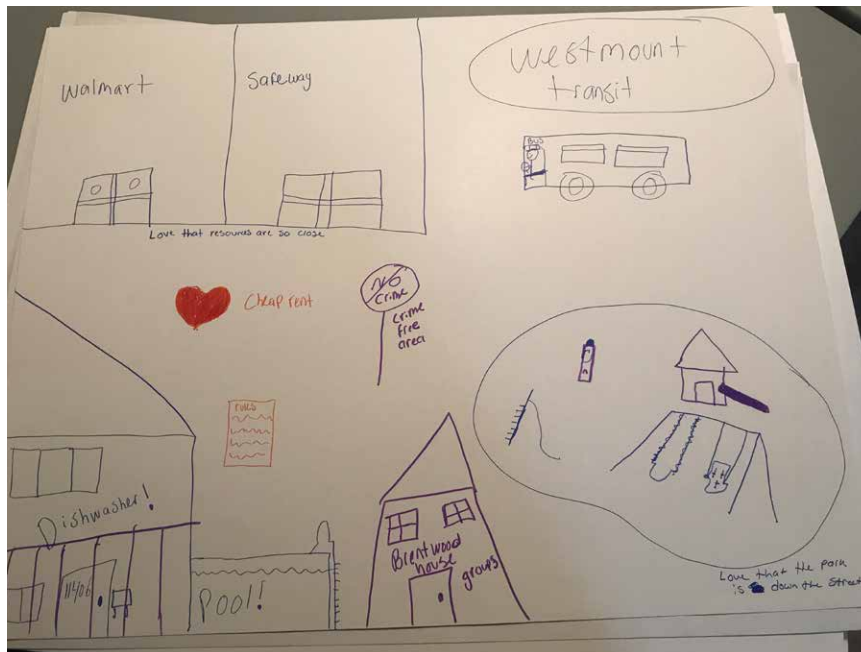
## AFFORDABLE, SAFE, SECURE, AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

This area describes the nature of the housing in the Successful Families program. Specifically, it outlines the setting and type of housing families live in, and the ways this housing is affordable, stable, safe and secure. The data for this portion derives from photovoice, participant observation, and individual interviews with Brentwood Housing Staff.

### Setting

Brentwood housing is a family oriented townhouse community located in the safe, quiet community of Woodcroft in Edmonton, Alberta. Brentwood is within walking distance of schools (elementary, junior high, and senior high), a mall, a transit station, parks, an active community league, and other amenities such as a library, health centre, swimming pool and grocery store. As such, Brentwood has a walkability score of 76 (out of 100) and is the 14<sup>th</sup> most 'walkable' neighbourhood in Edmonton (Walk Score, 2018). Brentwood also has four playgrounds on site with a focus on creating a sense of community and promoting child development.

*"...We have the transit centre close by which helps 'cause a lot of [parents] use the bus. And the grocery store close by 'cause once you spend a hundred bucks at the grocery store it's like, well now I need to pay for a cab to take all this home."*  
(Parent)



## **Type of Housing**

Brentwood housing is situated in a concentrated geographical area in the Woodcroft community. Housing units are in rows of 4 with a total of 236 units. As such, Brentwood lies between a cluster housing approach (separate units in the same building with support staff on site) and a scattered housing approach (dispersed across the city). As mentioned, Terra HSS provide onsite support from a house that was purchased by Brentwood Community Development Group and sits directly across the road from the townhouses. Each unit houses one family and has between 2-3 bedrooms, a living room, bathroom, kitchen with fridge and stove, and a washer and dryer. Monthly rent includes heat and water with tenants paying for their own power, phone, cable, and internet.

Brentwood Homes is a mixed-income housing community and combines affordable market and subsidized housing (see Table 6 for different types of housing). This mix is an important element of the program in creating an integrated, rather than segregated, community. From a legal standpoint, the same rules of tenancy apply to families whether they live in the market or subsidized housing (for example, relating to maintenance, applications, and tenancy law). This is also essential as it means that if participants discontinue with the program, they can continue as a regular tenant. That is, they would not be evicted or lose their home just because they are not in the program.

Table 6. Spectrum of housing, adapted from the City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Strategy 2016-2025, p.3

Non-Market Housing						Market Housing	
Short-Term Subsidized Accommodation		Affordable Housing					
Shelter Spaces	Short-term Accommodation	Supportive Housing	Supported Housing	Social Housing	Independent Living Affordable Housing	Market Affordable Housing	Market Housing
Emergency/overnight shelter	Short-term accommodation for persons in transition	Seniors lodges, assisted living, and enhanced living facilities. Supports are generally provided on site.	Seniors self-contained apartments with daily living supports. Housing First. External or mobile supports are available	Community housing with rent geared to income.	City cornerstones, self-contained seniors units, Habitat for Humanity, Co-op housing.	Housing that's modest in form and specification (first-time home buyers programs)	Rental and ownership housing provided by the private sector.

## Affordability

To create affordability for parents in the Successful Families program, housing subsidies are provided to offset rent using a “rent-geared-to-income” (RGI) structure. Rent, which usually sits at \$1250 for a two-bedroom unit or \$1350 for a three-bedroom unit, is therefore subsidized so that it is reduced to approximately 30% of parents’ total annual income (but must be over 50% of rent, i.e. \$625 or \$675). This can include income from social assistance, family allowances, wages, commissions, self-employment, alimony separation allowances, child support payments, interest, dividends, pensions, or any combination of these. Rent is further subsidized to around 28-29% of income if a parent is in employment or education to account for additional costs such as transportation, work clothing, etc. Subsidies therefore vary based on family circumstances and are calculated using a parent’s annual Notice of Assessment (from Canada Revenue Agency). Receiving and maintaining subsidy is dependent on participation in the Successful Families program.

The subsidy program at Brentwood sustains itself through the profit generated by the market rentals. Approximately 65% of the units are rented out at market value, which can subsidize up to 35% of the other units. This equates to about 83 available subsidized units. Despite having such a high number of units available, the number of teen families in the program is far less than this due to the number of HSS available to support them, because there is a certain level of readiness needed to be successful in the program, and because there is constant transition (approximately 3 families move in each month and the same or slightly fewer families move out).

To date, there have been a maximum of 33 units filled at one time.

## Stability

The goal of the Successful Families program is to create stability for families by providing permanent rather than transitional housing. As such, the program has a prevention-based, rather than an emergency approach to homelessness, which allows families to determine when they are ready to leave the program. This approach also minimizes transience for families. Frequent moves and housing instability can have a range of detrimental consequences for families, such as disruptions in education for parents and children and loss of social support networks. These factors also become risk factors for multigenerational homelessness. A prevention approach therefore benefits both the families who are at risk of transience, and reduces the financial and administrative burden on government systems, such as Alberta Supports.

Families can live in Brentwood indefinitely. However, supports are non-permanent as the goal is for parents to gain the skills needed to live independently. A goal for some participants is to make Brentwood their long-term home. There is currently no established cut-off date for subsidy, but it is tentatively set at seven years after program entry. It is also possible for participants to **continue living at Brentwood on a long-term basis** without needing to receive subsidy.

At Brentwood, parents can also strengthen their stability through the acquisition of assets such as owning a car and building their savings.

Up until recent changes in housing policy (e.g., Capital Region Housing), the possession of assets was a barrier to securing affordable housing as they were used as a marker of eligibility. Such eligibility criteria prevent families from bettering their lives and ultimately inhibit social mobility for families.

*“It’s about being proactive and able to get subsidy you can avoid being in an emergency and the stress that comes with that, like having to wait in line for emergency funding at 8am and being like, if I don’t get this, me and [my] child are going to the homeless shelter.”  
(Parent)*



## Safety and Security

Affordable housing is often located in neighbourhoods that are less safe, which creates a level of stress for parents who are raising young children.

“...I do find there’s a direct trade-off between affordability and safety.... Either they pay more and it’s safe, or they choose not to pay as much and it’s not safe. The landlord isn’t behaving in responsible ways or the building isn’t safe or the neighbourhood isn’t safe.... But our under 18’s, we tend to see them get dinged with both. They tend to be in unsafe situations and paying more money because of their age, right.” (Educational Support Staff)

As mentioned, the Woodcroft neighbourhood in which the Brentwood housing is located has a good record of safety. Brentwood has also recently become designated as “crime free,” so that housing is required to abide by certain standards such as having quality locks on doors and motion sensor lighting outside, and all residents are required to obtain criminal record checks before moving in. Importantly, the results of criminal record checks are examined on a case-by-case basis for potential program participants to determine if they should act as a barrier to entering the program. If parents have relatively minor offenses on their record that would not foreseeably impact their tenancy, Brentwood enact flexibility around this policy.



*“Another goal would be really, truly to support those families in maintaining long-term housing so they see Brentwood as a community that they can stay in, even though as they gain skills, gain employment, and their subsidy would be adjusted as their income gains, that they would feel that sense of community and stay there. Because so many of them have had so much transition in their life moving and their kids are so young and a lot of times they’ve already moved 4 or 5 times like in two years. So the goal of really supporting families to be long term tenants at Brentwood and seeing themselves as part of the community.” (Terra Leadership)*

## THE PARTNERSHIP

This area outlines the key elements of the Terra-Brentwood Partnership in providing supportive housing. The data for this portion derives from individual interviews with Terra and Brentwood staff and participant observation.

The presence of a well-functioning partnership between Terra and Brentwood is essential for the program itself to function. Trust, common values, a shared vision, information sharing, transparent communication, and a willingness to work through challenges are characteristics of the partnership that contribute to its success. Terra and Brentwood also conduct participant screening together as an important element of their collaboration. A critical element of the Terra-Brentwood partnership is the presence of **shared values and a common vision**. Leaders and front-line staff members from both Terra and Brentwood shared a common focus on providing supports that draws on the strengths and capacity of teen parents to work toward independence, raise resilient children, and foster healthy families:

Implementation of the Successful Families program began while the program was under development. As a result, staff roles and program goals were being developed while the program was being implemented, and ambiguity regarding roles was experienced as a challenge. It is essential that **staff have a clear understanding of their roles and program goals** to support the program's operationalization.

Related to staff roles, in the initial stages of program development and implementation staff reported that lines between landlords and support staff were more blurred. As a result, it became very difficult for front-line staff to balance the need for relationship building and supporting participants with feelings of obligation to report circumstances that could impact participants' tenancy. **Maintaining a separation between the roles of landlord and support staff is therefore hugely beneficial**. In other words, Brentwood assumes the role of landlord, while Terra staff provide support.

*"I think the one thing that stands out most is the common and shared values that...both Terra and Brentwood share around really, truly believing in the capacity of these young parents... what they need is... the right support at the right time around housing and that's really fundamental to them moving their lives forward." (Terra Leadership)*

“What that allows us to do is really focus on the families...And so directing our staff resources and energy and focus to those places. As opposed to, let’s say if that had been in a community apartment, all of the advocacy work, we would be doing with the landlord...all the work to try to find them alternate sources of funding because they got evicted...we had like 20 staff working on housing in different ways as opposed to now we can consolidate that, Brentwood does all of that, they do all the applications, all the screening, all the paperwork...because we’re not the landlord in this. Brentwood is the landlord.” (Terra Leadership)

In this way, Terra and Brentwood **complement the work of one another**. As a staff member described, Terra and Brentwood are “organizations with similar missions doing opposite sides of the work.” Along these lines, partners demonstrated their full investment in the program with a **willingness to work through challenges**. On a related note, **trust and transparent communication** between partners is critical for the effective operation of the program and for developing a strong partnership. Strong communication processes create an ability to **share information** regarding participants.

“I think just our capacity to have those really kind of candid conversations...more specific around just being really honest about what’s happening...before, it seems like there was a little bit of tentativeness around what to share and how much to share and if things were going wrong for the families, being worried about sharing that and I think that’s changed. I think we’ve become more clear about, we have to be sharing some of these things to alert them...sometimes we need to be really clear about, we see this going down a path that’s not going to be helpful to anybody.” (Terra Leadership)

*“As a landlord, [you] don’t have the ability to go have a conversation about... your drug addiction or whatever...so Terra brings that other side. That compassionate side that can talk to you, that can point you in the right direction, that can do all those things that landlords have to stay one legal step away from. But that also does the same thing for Terra. Cause they can’t come in and have to play landlord as well...That’s why it works.” (Brentwood Housing Staff)*

A number of partnership activities take place between Terra and Brentwood to support program delivery. Specifically, the Terra housing manager and Brentwood leadership attends bi-weekly “operation” meetings to discuss logistical details as well as potential new participants and tenant move-outs. Housing support staff also meet with the Brentwood office staff once per month to discuss specific details relating to program participants such as unpaid rent. The HSS also participate in monthly meetings with the CUP research team to discuss program development and reflect on program activities and impacts. In addition, Terra and Brentwood staff come together with the researchers on an annual basis for strategic planning. All these meetings contribute to maintaining a strong partnership and improve the quality of support for families.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

In addition to providing housing and wraparound supports, the Successful Families program aims to create a sense of community for families by connecting them to other agencies and services, developing natural supports (such as friends and family), and building relationships with other residents in the neighbourhood. The data for this portion derives from participant observation, interviews with staff, and photovoice.

**Community Agencies and Services.** Staff work to establish and maintain connections with community agencies (for example, the local food bank, library, Head Start) toward having the ability to refer families to other appropriate services as needed. The Successful Families program has established partnerships with community agencies such as the Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre, Edmonton Public Library, Health for Two, and Woodcroft Community League. For example, Jasper Place Child and Family Resource Centre facilitates a Books, Babies, and More program on site at the Brentwood Housing. These child-parent groups focus on early literacy programming, promote healthy child development, and build parenting capacity. Through these partnerships with external agencies, staff link participants with community agencies and build participants’ capacity to continue accessing community resources independently.

**Books, Babies and More** is a program tailored to teen parents to encourage development of positive skills and attitudes toward literacy. Participants are introduced to interactive and fun activities to stimulate their child(ren)'s language development, social skills, and communication, and to encourage a lifelong appreciation of literacy

**Health for Two** is a program for students who are about to become first time mothers. This program introduces participants to labour and delivery, and prepares them for what they can expect. Participants are provided information about birth control options for the future, fetal development, postpartum depression, newborn baby care, and can take a tour at the Royal Alexandra or Grey Nuns hospital. Participants are also provided milk coupons.

**Natural Supports.** Housing support staff encourage participants to develop natural supports so that participants have an extended support network outside of those provided by Terra, which can prevent challenging circumstances from escalating into crises. Natural supports therefore exist outside of the '9-to-5' support provided as part of the program, and tend to include other participant families, neighbours in the Brentwood community, and parent's relations. These supports become especially important when participants 'age out' of the program, either after five years or after reaching a certain age (22 years for mothers and 25 years for fathers).

Some parents babysit for one another and have developed social relationships through the groups they attend. Relationships such as these, in addition to those with family and their children's other parents, can provide an opportunity for respite for some parents.

However, not all parents have the option to share childcare with family members and previous partners, making relationships with other families and neighbours in the community all the more important. Developing relationships with neighbours is also essential for reducing the stigma that can exist for teen parents, particularly in light of NIMBY (Not in My Backyard), a phenomenon in which residents of a neighbourhood deem a social program like Successful Families to be undesired and resist it.



*"This picture represents the friends I have made with other moms and their kids. And as a result of these friendships and connections, I feel a part of the community and like I have someone close by to be friends with." (Parent)*

*"...Another thing that keeps me sane is the fact that my child goes with his dad on the weekend. I love being around my kid but it can be overwhelming." (Parent)*



## **INTEGRATED RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

This area provides an overview of the ways integrated research and evaluation can benefit the development of complex programs such as Successful Families by supporting a culture of learning and creating a level of consistency in the face of continual adaptation and transition.

### **Developmental**

A developmental approach informed the research and evaluation and provided a flexible way to generate learning that could inform rapid adaptation of the program. This was particularly important due to the formative nature of the program in its early stages of development and the complex task of providing supportive housing for teen families without a blueprint to follow. Developmental evaluation provided a way to frequently assess how the program was unfolding, discern which strategies held promise and which needed adaptation, and provided guidance on what to try next (Gamble, 2008). Such an approach was dependent on the presence of a culture of learning in the organizations involved and within the partnership itself. This culture of learning was supported by the buy-in of leadership and the frequent meetings between partners that had an emphasis on reflection and change. As such, learning was identified quickly and new strategies were developed, implemented, tested and modified in short cycles. This led to the creation of a supportive housing program that has been adapted repeatedly but become stabilized over time. This new level of stability is reflected in the increased number of families in the program, from approximately 20 to 30 in the previous twelve months.

## Community-Based

In addition to a developmental approach, the research and evaluation were also informed by the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR; Israel et al., 2003). CBPR integrates research, action, reflection, and communication (Greenwood & Levin, 1998) and brings researchers and community partners together to develop mutually beneficial knowledge intended to create meaningful social change. This approach has meant that the research team has been involved for the duration of the program and been deeply engaged over four years. Not only has this increased the researchers' understanding of the program, it has brought a level of consistency to the program as staff members have transitioned in and out, and has aided the documentation of the program's history over time.







## Ongoing Challenges and Areas for Improvement

This section outlines the ongoing challenges that are experienced with(in) the program and provides areas for further improvement in providing supportive housing for teen families. These challenges are categorized in terms of supports, participants, housing, staff, and research and evaluation.

### SUPPORTS

Although supports for participants while they are in the program have been modified over time through the introduction of the phased approach, there is also a need to focus on the supports provided to families' during their transition in and out of the program.

#### Transitional Support

**Moving in.** To help participants with their transition into the program, it is recommended that HSS make the orientation meeting with future participants a priority. This orientation meeting would occur before participants move into housing and would help support the development of relationships between HSS and new participants, provide an opportunity for staff to answer participants' questions, and provide more clarity about program expectations.

In addition, it would be valuable to have HSS present when participants move into their homes to provide on-site support during the walk-through with the landlord. The walk-through process has been highlighted by participants as an important part of the move-in process. The walk-through provides an opportunity for participants to be shown their new house, provided information about acceptable damages (to avoid losing their damage deposit), and gain further details about their tenancy - information that is often taken-for-granted (such as the need to give a month's notice if families want to move out). Many families are also starting their lives from scratch and do not have any furniture or supplies. It might be helpful, therefore, to provide a 'welcome' basket that covers some of these more immediate needs (e.g., toilet paper, cleaning supplies, laundry detergent).

**Moving out.** An area that has received less attention since the program began is the 'move out' phase of the program. This phase can be especially tenuous because of the unpredictability and rapid nature of many moves, particularly when a family is evicted due to a significant and discrete event (e.g., violence, damage to the apartment). Under such circumstances an eviction notice is given that requires families to find a new place to live in a short space of time (e.g., 48 hours), which can put families at risk of homelessness.

Given the precarious nature of families' lives, this is a gap that needs attention. One potential option includes referral to alternative housing that more adequately fits the families' needs at that time (particularly when domestic violence is involved). However, a general lack of alternative housing options for teen parents creates a barrier to this. Although supports from HSS can continue for three months after families move out of Brentwood, this relationship does not usually continue due to the negative circumstances precipitating many families' exits from the program.

*"One thing we are not asking is what do you do once you're not gonna keep your place? If you do lose your apartment how do you deal with that?" (Terra Housing Support Staff)*

*"We are supposed to have a transition plan when they move out. They are allowed to be with us for three months, I think. But most times when they move out they want nothing to do with us." (Terra Housing Support Staff)*

## Violence and Mental Health Supports

The need for further supports around mental health and domestic violence has arisen as an area requiring greater consideration. This is further supported by the quantitative data indicating many of the parents experience low self-esteem, which is known to be closely linked with mental health (Anto & Jayan, 2016). Increased mental health supports could include regular and free (or low cost) access to counsellors or psychologists. Parents also indicated the need for increased support in terms of domestic violence.

“That makes me wonder if we should have some sort of, not like procedures, but support for those kinds of incidents that involve violence. I grew up in a violent home and I didn’t have those supports...just cause I’ve heard lots of girls here who say that they’ve gone through violence. And having extra supports here to deal with that would maybe help us. I think we need extra mental health support so [parents] can feel like when that happens their worker can say, ok, here’s what we can do, get you in the right direction and help you through this. Cause our workers are really good at talking to us about it but what do we do about it after?”  
(Parent)

Although there are two counsellors at Braemar, the school that many parents attend, it is difficult to get an appointment during the school year (i.e. between September and June) because of the high demand. In addition, not all participants attend the high school as many have already moved onto employment or further education. Participants have shared that, ideally, these supports would be provided on site at the Terra House because it is a place they already feel safe.

*“I feel like it would be easier to have someone here cause we already trust coming here and feel comfortable coming here to like open up about our stuff. It’s a familiar space.” (Parent)*

## PARTICIPANTS

### Trauma

Families' histories of trauma are an ongoing struggle even once stable housing is made available, and contribute substantially to their continued precariousness and risk of homelessness. It is what makes the need for wraparound supports in combination with housing so great. There are several aspects around participants' experiences of trauma that require further consideration. The first is that the full extent of trauma might not be known until families have settled into the program. For some, the risk of being declined for housing is perceived as too great to disclose the complete details of their situations during the application and interview process.

Additionally, for some families it is when immediate needs are met (through housing, food, etc.) that the space is created for trauma to resurface. The first six months of the program therefore seem to be both the most precarious and simultaneously the most crucial for participants in terms of accessing support and fostering relationships with HSS and other families.

Engaging participants during this phase continues to be a challenge, and some families are evicted without ever having met their HSS worker. Clear communication of expectations to participants before they enter the program is therefore an ongoing goal, and this includes clarification of (and rationale for) these expectations with outreach workers or SEA so they can adequately convey and reiterate them with their participants.

"That's the thing, too, is the presence of trauma that maybe wasn't talked about at the interview can start to influence, you know, not attending groups and things like that. Or not engaging in home visits because you aren't comfortable with people in your home. Things like that you know. And those are some of the expectations... on our participants to maintain their subsidy." (Terra Housing Support Staff)

*"They will say yes [to anything] because I need to get out of the situation that I'm in and I'm pretty sure [name of participant]'s was an emergency...She was sleeping on her mom's couch." (Terra Housing Support Staff)*

*"[The] transition from a group home was culture shock. I was going from always being with people to always being by myself. That was challenging. But what I appreciate about living here is the space. I do not miss living in a group home at all. Here, you have more room to parent in your own style without being criticized." (Parent)*

The second aspect that needs further consideration around participants' experiences of trauma is that individuals who work with participants but are not employed by Terra (e.g., researchers, housing staff) can all trigger or exacerbate trauma for participants if they are not provided training or made aware of the impacts of trauma. For example, during photovoice groups participants sometimes share stories of trauma that researchers may not be trained to adequately respond to. The presence of male maintenance staff in participants' homes can also be a trigger for those who may have experienced violence. Although not everyone that families encounter will be trauma-informed, and to expect this would be unrealistic, it may still be helpful to create an enhanced understanding of the impacts of trauma more broadly across the program. It may also be important to develop certain procedures for preventing re-traumatization, such as introducing participants to maintenance staff when they move in, or sending text notifications before visits.

In addition, it might be worth spending some time preparing participants for the various interactions they are going to encounter when they enter Brentwood.



*"...we're dealing with someone who has high trauma. Single mom. And someone knocks on her door at 11pm.... She texted me and said, 'I'm terrified to let them in' at 11 o'clock, but I didn't get it until the next day.... I don't think anybody here would let them in...and we probably don't have a quarter of the trauma that our participants do."*  
(Terra Housing Support Staff)

## HOUSING

On the housing side, the program faces a couple of ongoing challenges. The first is the general lack of affordable housing options along the housing spectrum for families vulnerable to homelessness. This contributes to a situation in which families apply to Brentwood who are desperate to secure housing, but might not be ready for the level of independence required to be successful in the program. Entering the program and having to leave in a short space of time can be more detrimental to families than not entering in the first place. For example, if parents access emergency funds from Alberta Supports to cover their rent and then leave the program shortly afterwards, they may be ineligible for those funds at a later date to support their transition into new housing. As such, there is currently a gap between the form of independent housing in the Successful Families program and highly supported housing (e.g., group homes).

A second tension lies in the balance between treating families as regular tenants to reduce any distinction between participants and the other tenants who live at Brentwood, while still recognizing that they are families who remain at risk and may need some allowances. Housing support staff are constantly 'navigating the grey', and cannot work in black and white terms if they want to maintain flexible policies and practices and reduce the number of families who fall through the cracks. This, however, creates situations where it can be difficult to make decisions and relies on a delicate combination of judgement and compassion.



## STAFF

### Supervisor

The addition of a housing supervisor to work alongside the housing manager would provide additional support to HSS in a similar way that supervisors support outreach workers at Terra. In this scenario, the housing manager would focus more on administration, program structure, and granting. The supervisor would be a point of contact for HSS when they need advice or support directly about participants, or as a point of contact for participants themselves. Having a supervisor would help to split the responsibilities that currently fall solely on the housing manager, and help HSS feel more thoroughly supported in their roles (particularly being in a separate geographical location than the agency itself).

### High staff turnover

As with most social service agencies, staff turnover is high in the Successful Families program due to the highly difficult nature of the work. Over three years of the program, six staff members have left and seven new staff members have been hired. Much of the turnover in the early stages of the program was due to burnout and/or the need for a mental health leave. As a result, the Terra leadership has tried to help staff create boundaries around the work to avoid reaching that level. However, with limited funding and an endlessly growing list of responsibilities, it is an ongoing challenge.

This high staff turnover also has implications for the program. Parents have shared the impacts on themselves when the workers they have developed trusting relationships with leave the program, requiring parents to start again with new HSS workers.

Expecting staff turnover to be reduced entirely is likely unrealistic given the nature of the work. It is therefore important to create a program culture that maintains itself through staff changes so that the program 'story' can be passed along by remaining staff, whether that is in housing, outreach, or education. The next area of focus, communication, can support the creation of this consistent program story.

*"...For me, it was a pretty intense burnout. I was in this field for a really long time and I just completely fell apart physically and mentally and needed to take a year off.... So I really looked at it and was realizing how much I was taking on of other people's...and that I'd have all this fear if I was taking sick days... because I would feel that no one else was going to do that work..." (Terra Housing Support Staff)*

*"...it can be hard when they try to assign you to a new worker, because you wonder if they'll be gone in six months anyway and then you have to tell your story all over again."*  
(Parent)



## Communication

Effective communication mechanisms are essential for the Successful Families program to run smoothly and ensure families are supported in the best ways possible. A large part of this communication is the ability to convey the different supportive roles to workers across housing, outreach, and education to avoid duplication or gaps in support. Clarification of roles becomes particularly important in preventing crises and intervening where possible or necessary. It also creates a level of consistency for participants in terms of their own development and expectations of support.

Ideally, each participant would be designated an HSS worker and another staff member from outreach or education. However, this can create confusion between staff as to what their roles are in relation to a participant. To help provide clarity to the various workers who support a participant and ensure participants are receiving the most comprehensive level of support available to them, further role differentiation between staff is needed. An internal document for staff would be helpful to distinguish the role of HSS from outreach staff and ESS, and indicate where they can complement one another. Unit review meetings could also include a portion dedicated specifically to housing to discuss any arising issues for participants, changes in program policies and practices, successes, and areas of opportunity. These unit review meetings and internal document can also serve as ways to tell the program 'story', and provide the rationale for program decisions to workers across the agency so they can answer participants' questions and adequately prepare them for move-in (for example, 'what is the phased approach and why has it been introduced?'; 'What counts as a group and how do participants track it if it wasn't provided by HSS?'). Currently, SEA do not attend unit review meetings, and it would be beneficial to find a way to integrate them into the communication system. Additionally, it would be useful if notification between agency staff when critical incidents occur became part of a standardized process rather than a courtesy.

*"...it could be difficult going from one worker that's going to the end of the earth...to someone that's more within their boundaries... it's confusing for the participant." (Terra Outreach staff)*

## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

### Measurement

Although the research team was persistent in the goal of completing assessments and questionnaires with twenty participants at three time points, we ultimately realized over time that this goal was unattainable. Although the multi-pronged approach resulted in collecting data from some participants, we had continuous cancellations from participants for child development assessment appointments (approximately an 80% cancellation rate). After some reflection, we realized that this form of data collection may not be the most appropriate with the participants in this program due to the apprehension many parents have about assessment, potential judgement, and fear of child services intervention. Importantly, some of the same teen parents who failed to attend one-time assessment appointments eagerly engaged in the prolonged, more relational method of photovoice. Therefore, although we did not reach our goal of twenty assessments across three time points, we respected participants' decision not to engage with this particular method of data collection. Rather than measuring change in child development over time, we looked at other options for working with the data and began to increasingly focus on the qualitative methods.

### Adaptation

In using a developmental approach, we value the changes and continual program modification that can be supported through research and evaluation. However, it was important during program development that there were not too many changes at one time. This allowed adequate time to test and build on a new idea without undermining the core structure of the program. An additional learning relating to adaptation was in finding a balance between practicality and idealism. At times there was a need to implement new and imperfect strategies based on 'best guesses', while knowing that these would be improved over time. As such, all staff (particularly those in leadership positions) need to have a level of comfort with unknowns and taking risks.



## Summary and Implications

Without access to safe and affordable housing, teen families can become stuck in a cycle of poverty and homelessness, with negative implications for healthy child development. The provision of supportive housing has been identified as a key factor in supporting the success of teen families. Despite the benefits of supportive housing, no model currently exists outlining the most effective ways to provide supportive housing for the specific needs of teen parents and their children. The purpose of this project was to develop an effective program of supportive housing for teen families in Edmonton using research and evaluation as a tool to support the process. A number of methods were used to collect data, including a literature review, participant observation during team meetings and onsite visits, staff interviews (individual and focus groups), photovoice with teen parents, self-report questionnaires and child development assessments, and program monitoring. The data generated through these methods was analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics and used to produce the three main sections presented in this document:

- **Framing the Issue: Supportive Housing for Teen Families**

This section presented the grey and academic literature reviewed relating to two main areas: 1) Teen Families, and 2) Housing and Homelessness. Each of the areas was further broken down into a number of sub categories that collectively described why the provision of supportive housing is essential for teen families. Quotes from parents in the Successful Families program were integrated throughout to illustrate personalized experiences of the themes documented in the literature.

- **Responding to the Issue: The Successful Families Program**

This section provided a detailed overview of Successful Families as a program that responds to the need for supportive housing for teen families. Each area corresponded to a different level of the Successful Families model, starting with the families at the centre of the model, and working outwards through the various supportive structures that aim to ‘wraparound’ the families. As such, the program overview was divided into the themes: 1) Families, 2) Supports and Services, 3) Affordable, Safe and Secure Housing, and 4) The Partnership, 5) Community Connections, and 6) Integrated Research and Evaluation.

- **Ongoing Challenges and Areas for Improvement**

This section outlined the ongoing challenges that are experienced with(in) the program and provided areas for further improvement in providing supportive housing for teen families. These challenges were categorized in terms of supports, participants, housing, staff, and research and evaluation.

Teen families have both complex needs and strengths that require relationship-based, flexible, strength-based, relational approaches delivered by non-judgmental staff. While there is a clear need for responsive and individualized supports, it was discovered that the Successful Families program also requires structure, accountability, boundaries, and a focus on prevention, empowerment, and capacity-building in order to serve families well. For the current program, this structure has taken the form of a phased approach as well as clear expectations placed on families that provide the opportunity to remain in the program and progress through phases. It is also important for staff (housing support, educational support, and outreach) to have a clear understanding of their own roles, the roles of other support workers, and the program goals in order to provide more effective supports to families. This clarification has been facilitated by the presence of a full-time housing manager on site. In addition, it has been critical for roles between support staff (i.e., Terra staff) and the landlord (i.e., Brentwood) to be distinct.

In this way, Brentwood takes care of landlord responsibilities, provides subsidies to families, and maintains positive relationships with tenants.

The presence of a well-functioning partnership between Terra and Brentwood is also important for the model itself to function. Trust, common values, a shared vision, information sharing, transparent communication, and a willingness to work through challenges are characteristics of the partnership that staff members attribute to its success.

Brentwood Housing is situated within the Woodcroft community and provides an affordable housing option that, according to the parents in the project, is also a safe, family-friendly place to live. This is an essential aspect of the program, particularly in light of the increasing lack of affordable housing available in Edmonton and the barriers teen families face in securing housing. In order to gain housing, many parents experience a trade-off between affordability and safety. The Successful Families program means parents don't have to choose between affordability and raising their children in a safe environment. Additionally, Successful Families participants seem to have built friendships with other families in the program as well as with neighbours in the community, which has led to a sense of connection and belonging. Together with the various amenities that the community has to offer, Woodcroft has become an important aspect of the Successful Families program model.

It appears the Successful Families program is making a significant difference by contributing to a range of positive outcomes for teen families. The Successful Families program uses an innovative approach to address the needs of participants by providing them with safe, secure and affordable housing as well as wraparound supports. This program has the potential to provide a much-needed model for serving teen families that can be used by non-profit agencies and other human services systems. The information generated through research and evaluation, including that provided in this document, goes some way to filling a gap in the grey and academic literature relating to supportive housing for teen families. Ultimately, the Successful Families program model can inform programming and policy across sectors, and be used to optimize homelessness prevention and housing services for teen families across Canada.



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