

# Research Digest

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## IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH IN MONTREAL



Summary based from the following article

Morisseau-Guillot, R., Aubin, D., Deschênes, J-M., Gioia, M., Malla, A., Bauco, P., Dupont, M-E., & Abdel-Baki, A. (2019). A Promising Route Towards Improvement of Homeless Young People's Access to Mental Health Services: The Creation and Evolution of an Outreach Service Network in Montréal. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 56, 258-270.

**KEYWORDS:** Homeless youth • Youth mental health • Access to care • Network • Integrated care

### WHY YOU SHOULD CARE



Homeless youth have often lived through many situations – abuse, bullying, child protection systems, all of which can contribute to severe mental illness.



Even though emergency services provide social support to homeless youth, mental health services are rarely offered, often leaving youth with worse outcomes.



Youth homelessness is a high cost for our society (estimated \$4.5-6 billion in 2007).

### CURRENT SITUATION

Homeless youth live independent of parents or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to secure safe, stable, and consistent housing. A number of existing services – such as day centres, meal programs, shelters and other housing initiatives – help homeless youth with basic survival, food and shelter. However, they might not necessarily be equipped to meet the complex mental health needs of these youth. In some cases, services specifically targeted at a particular issue or problem might ignore the number of obstacles that homeless youth live every day.

### APPROACH

The Réseau d'intervention de proximité auprès des jeunes de la rue (RIPAJ) or Montréal Homeless Youth Network proposed a solution: ensure that all service providers (psychosocial, psychological, psychiatric, and other specialized services) are accustomed to the everyday realities and challenges faced by homeless youth, and work together so that these youth receive seamless and simple access to the services they need.

## PROCESS

### CREATING A NETWORK

Noting that their services were working in silos, various service providers came together to address the obstacles that hinder access to mental health care for homeless youth.

The overarching goal of the RIPAJ network is to ensure that homeless youth are connected to the right services, regardless with whom or where in the network they first made contact. Together, each network member works collaboratively with youth so they can receive the right care and support including school, employment, hygiene, access to food and meals, family intervention, art and music therapy, and psychological services.

### CHALLENGES

- Homeless youth who suffer from more severe symptoms often do not benefit as much from a “one-stop shop” approach.
- Some limitations include lack of continuity, and rigidity in the clinical services, and young people’s own feelings about institutional care.

### LOOKING FORWARD

This model can be implemented in other urban centres to optimize services through the creation of a network to ultimately better address these multiple and complex needs.

## NETWORK IN ACTION



[Dans la rue](#) is one of the RIPAJ’s biggest partner organizations, which provides all types of services under one roof, and helps to normalize the seeking of mental health support.



[Clinique des Jeunes de la rue](#) (of the CIUSSS Centre-Sud-de-l’Île-de-Montréal) provides physical and mental health care by way of a GP, nurse, psychologist, social worker, and/or dentist.



[Équipe d’intervention intensive de proximité](#) (EQIIP SOL), of the Centre hospitalier de l’Université de Montréal (CHUM), works to provide psychiatric care while also supporting other needs, such as finding stable housing, solving legal problems, etc.



Shelters (such as [Le Refuge des Jeunes](#)) and supervised housing organizations for youth (such as [Les Auberges du cœur](#)) offer a range of services, including support to family/carers and, supervised apartments.



Specialized inpatient and outpatient services (such as the [Groupe d’intervention alternative par les pairs](#), or GIAP) for youth dealing with substance use or gambling problems, and organizations that support youth using harm reduction and peer support models.

## Important Considerations



Be open to potential new partners



Develop an alliance between different stakeholders



Respect each organization’s mandate and take advantage of their strengths