

Point-in-Time Count

Toolkit module



Canadian
Observatory on
Homelessness
homelesshub.ca

Youth Magnet Events

It can be hard to measure youth homelessness through a PiT Count. Youth, likely to experience hidden homelessness, can be missed during unsheltered and sheltered counts. In response, communities have used youth magnet events to increase youth representation to improve count accuracy.

As part of the Point-in-Time Count Toolkit, this document provides guidance to Point-in-Time (PiT) Count coordinators on successfully planning and implementing youth magnet events. It includes learning from End Homelessness St. John's, Choices for Youth and the Youth Leadership Council, who, together, successfully implemented a youth-led magnet event as part of the St. John's 2016 PiT Count.

Acknowledgements

Funded by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

This guidance was developed based on input from the Youth Leadership Council (YLC)¹, Choices for Youth² and End Homelessness St. John's³.

Thanks also to Sarah Brown, Youth Technical Advisor, Jane Henderson, Director of Evaluation, Choices for Youth, and Krista Gladney, PiT Count Coordinator, End Homelessness St. John's, who helped shape this document and provided invaluable input throughout the process.

Designer: Dylan Ostetto, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.



¹The Youth Leadership Council (YLC) is an advocacy group that is youth-driven, youth-focused and youth-run. The purpose of the YLC is to break down barriers for youth through the lived experiences of others.

²Choices for Youth (CFY) is a non-profit, charitable organization that operates in the St. John's (NL) metro area. CFY provides programming and support services to homeless and vulnerable youth (aged 16-29) by focusing on five key life factors – housing, employment, education, mental/physical health and family stability.

³End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) is a community-led, 'collective impact' board that brings together all sectors to implement a plan to prevent and end homelessness in St. John's.

Youth Magnet Events

A magnet event is a strategy used during a PiT Count to attract a specific target group to a planned time and location. This allows a community to survey individuals experiencing homelessness who might otherwise not be surveyed through a sheltered or unsheltered count. The event, generally lasting a few hours, is advertised well in advance of the day of the count, and usually includes food, services and the option to complete a PiT Count survey.

Youth magnet events include programming, entertainment and sometimes giveaways that appeal specifically to youth. Successful magnet events are promoted widely through social media, word of mouth, and youth-serving agencies. All youth are welcome, regardless of their living situation.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL MAGNET EVENT

YOUTH-LED

ENGAGING

WELCOMING

ACCESSIBLE

RELAXED

SAFE

Benefits of A Youth Magnet Event

Although a youth magnet event increases resource use and planning time, communities with a priority to assess and respond to youth homelessness should consider implementing one or more youth magnet events. Rural communities and communities with few shelter beds may also benefit from including a magnet event.

The benefits of a youth magnet event include:

Surveying youth who are couch-surfing. In the [Point-in-Time Count Toolkit](#), we recommend that communities include youth who are staying temporarily with friends and family in their PiT Count surveys. You are unlikely to find youth who are couch-surfing through the unsheltered and sheltered counts, but a magnet event can attract youth who are less connected to homeless-serving agencies.

Connecting youth to services. By promoting the youth magnet event to a wide network, youth experiencing homelessness who are not connected to services may attend the event. There, they can collect information about the services available in the community, receive referrals to agencies and meet youth in similar situations.

Providing leadership opportunities for youth advisors. As noted in the [Youth Leadership Module](#), offering involvement to youth with lived experience in planning and implementing a magnet event helps build their skills, become leaders in the community and contribute positively to the count.

Creating community support for youth homelessness. A youth magnet event requires a range of partners, including those outside the homeless-serving sector. Therefore, these events are an opportunity for local businesses and volunteers to learn more about the issue of youth homelessness in their community, and offer their support.

Planning A Youth Magnet Event

Engaging youth

A successful youth magnet event will be youth-focused and, when possible, youth-led. Involve your youth advisors or youth leadership groups to plan the event. Ask youth what services, food and entertainment would be appealing to their peers. Engaging youth through planning and implementing the count will also improve attendance, as they can promote the count through word of mouth and social media.

Selecting a lead organization

Select a lead organization to help facilitate the youth magnet event. This may be a youth-serving homelessness organization, or the YMCA, United Way or a local organization.

If you are partnering with youth advisors to plan and implement a magnet event, partner also with the organization that is supporting them.

Finding a location

Consult your lead organization and youth to help select an appropriate location for the magnet event. Some communities hold the events at homeless-serving agencies; others hold them at more neutral locations, such as a community centre or park. The benefit of holding the event in a youth-serving agency with a range of programming, including but not solely dedicated to housing, is that it has the potential to attract a wider range of youth. Neutral locations may increase the participation of people who do not identify as homeless.

Building partnerships

Youth magnet events tend to have a range of programming, service offerings, food and/or entertainment to encourage attendance. To keep costs low, ask your PiT Count committee and partners to solicit donations and build creative partnerships. Grocery stores may be willing to donate gift cards, and businesses may be willing to donate food, personal hygiene supplies, or other items that may interest youth.

St. John's 2016 PiT Count Youth Magnet Event

The magnet event was hosted at Choices for Youth. The success of the event, in part, was due to the decision to hold the event during a regularly scheduled community mealtime. Youth who regularly attended had the option to fill out the PiT Count survey, but the event also attracted youth who had not previously been connected to the agency. As you plan your magnet event, consider whether there are other youth events on which you can "piggyback."

St. John's 2016 PiT Count Youth Magnet Event

Local colleges, technical schools and businesses donated services to youth attending the magnet event. These services included hair and makeup, manicures, and massage. A dental hygienist was also available onsite and there were information booths covering tattoo safety and safe sex practices. These services proved to be a huge draw and, most importantly, created a fun, welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere.

Promoting the event

To be successful, you will need to promote your event beyond clients of residential homeless-serving agencies, as many of these youth will already be included in the count through the sheltered survey.

Work with your youth advisors to develop a communication strategy. Create flyers, posters and cards to distribute in the weeks before the count. Social media, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, is a good way to spread the word to youth. Ask your youth advisors to share information with their friends and personal networks, as appropriate. Most youth will hear about the event through informal channels.

As you promote the event, explain it as part of a community-wide effort to better understand local housing needs. Be clear that all youth are welcome to attend, and the survey is optional and anonymous. We do not recommend using the word “homeless” in your promotional materials, since many youth experiencing housing instability and homelessness do not identify as such.

Finally, specify any age limits for event attendance. Some organizations do not allow youth under 16 on their premises. Conversely, if you are promoting the event widely, it is likely older adults will attend. Restricting the upper age of attendees will encourage a safer, more welcoming environment.

Recruiting and volunteers

You will need volunteers to survey youth and support the general administration of the event. Ask your lead organization what their volunteer requirements are. Some agencies may require any volunteers on their premises to have completed criminal background checks. You will need to know this information as you assign volunteers to their roles on the day of the count.

Some youth may prefer to do the PiT Count survey with a peer. Recruit and train youth volunteers, such as your youth advisors, to deliver PiT Count surveys at the event.

It can be difficult to estimate how many youth will attend an event and be interested in participating in the survey, so it is better to have more trained volunteers than you may end up needing than fewer.

Staffing the event

If your lead organization is hosting the event at their agency, they may need additional staff on site. Work with the organization to identify the best way to handle the increased attendance at the site during the event. We recommend assigning a PiT Count committee member, assistant coordinator or strong team leader to the event to oversee the administration of the survey and supervise volunteers. This person should oversee the collection and storing of completed survey forms to ensure they are not lost or misplaced.

St. John's 2016 PiT Count Youth Magnet Event

The event location was divided into three distinct areas. First, there was an area where youth arrived, gathered, and ate; second, there was a large room where volunteers could conduct surveys with youth; and finally, there was an area downstairs where hair, makeup and massage were offered. With a separate survey room, youth did not feel pressured to participate; however, many did participate after discussing the idea with friends or the youth advisors who organized the event.

Creating a welcoming environment

Although the primary purpose of a youth magnet event is to collect survey data from youth, the survey should be optional, and youth should feel comfortable and welcomed whether or not they are eligible or willing to participate in the survey. A magnet event should not feel like a research environment. When you're choosing your event location, make sure it allows for the survey area being set apart from the other activities.

For more information on conducting Youth Counts, refer to:

- ▶ [The Point-in-Time Count Toolkit](#)
- ▶ [Youth Readiness Assessment](#)
- ▶ [Youth Leadership](#)