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# Open for Business: Exploring the Life Stages of Two Canadian Street Youth Shelters

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*Youth shelters have emerged as significant resources for homeless and runaway adolescents. Through participant observations of shelter culture, review of agency archival materials, and in-depth interviews with 21 shelter workers (front line staff, middle managers, and upper-level executives), this analysis explores the life stages of two Canadian street youth shelters, highlighting the dramatic transformations in their internal operations and external environments. This paper also offers an understanding of organizational evolutionary processes.*

## Introduction

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, street youth shelters were established as safe houses for homeless and runaway youth. These organizations provided basic needs services (i.e., shelter, food, clothing) and short-term counseling supports. Soon after its inception, the youth shelter evolved into surrogate parents for this abandoned and/or nomadic population. Homeless and runaway youth regularly characterize youth shelters as helpful and needed services (Alleva, 1988; Janus, McCormack, Burgess and Hartman, 1987; Karabanow, 1994; 1999; Karabanow and Rains, 1997). Accordingly, youth shelters achieved credibility from their client base, and at present, they are a significant resource for troubled adolescents throughout North America.

This paper documents the life stages of two prominent Canadian street youth shelters, Covenant House (CH) and Youth Without Shelter (YWS), in order to highlight their significant transformations throughout the years. The stories of YWS and CH are a

striking portrait of conflict begetting change and change begetting innovation. The external network of youth shelters consists of other organizations, clients, and the community. Each of these constituents places expectations upon youth shelters, some of which may not necessarily be compatible with the shelter's mandate. This paper examines the major trends in the local histories of CH and YWS, highlighting the Shelters' interactions with clients, other organizations, and the public. The analysis also explores organizational change behavior.

A study of youth shelter evolution is useful for several reasons. First, the number of people living on the streets grows each year. Some experts in the field suggest that the present homeless situation is approaching "national disaster" status. However, there is little research regarding the types of organizations that exist to help this population. There is even less known about their interactions with one another. By shedding light upon how specific agencies work (and work together), we can discover whether a given population is actually being helped within that system. As noted by Hall and Clark (1975:113), "In the delivery of human services, for example, the recipient of those services is clearly influenced by the nature of the system which delivers them. Is he passed from one organization to another? Is he fought over or avoided by organizations in the system? Is he overserved or underserved?" My analysis uncovers such queries.

Second, we are now in the midst of a political environment that espouses neo-conservative values and neo-liberal economics that advocates for less government in the market place and a replacement of state care with community care. As argued by Henry (1987:152) in his analysis of two voluntary shelters in the United States: "Today, with cutbacks in the public welfare system, especially general assistance, the problem of homelessness requires an even heavier commitment from the shelter organizational population." In this sense, it is not only timely but necessary to investigate and understand the actors who are increasingly assuming the role of caring for our society's disadvantaged.

### Methodology

The methods of investigation within this study are naturalistic—employing participant observations of shelter culture, re-

view of agency archival materials, and in-depth interviews with 21 shelter workers (front line staff, middle managers, and upper-level executives). With these methodological tools, I constructed each shelter's local history, highlighting its life story and evolutionary process. Fieldwork spanned ten months (between November 1998 and August 1999) and incorporated both ethnographic (immersion into the field) and grounded theory (allowing theory to fit the data) approaches. Data analysis involved chronologically organizing historical material in order to build each shelter's life story, comparing cases (to each other, to other youth shelters and to the literature), and linking and categorizing common themes that emerged from the data.

I selected two cases which varied in terms of age, size, and location. Moreover, these shelters were chosen to represent diverse operations, varied statuses within the youth shelter system, and disparate relationships with the youth-in-trouble network (i.e., formal and informal agencies which are generally involved in the lives of disadvantaged and disturbed adolescents).

Established in 1982, CH is the oldest street kid shelter in Canada and maintains a legitimate and reputable status among street kid agencies and the Toronto public, due to its large funding base, experience, media savvy, and professional style. It approximates a formalized and professionalized organization with well developed technologies, procedures and resources. Funded primarily by the Catholic Church (through the ShareLife organization) and private donations, CH is often described as a conservative agency which views itself as rescuing kids from the horrors of street life. Its conservative style is reflected in the shelter philosophy, rules and structure (for example, early curfews, dress code, structured plans and assessments, and anti-abortion position).

While CH may appear as the model shelter (the largest, most experienced, and best equipped), YWS is more representative of existing youth shelters. Established in 1986, YWS is primarily funded by the government and has experienced a myriad of financial crises. Situated in a Toronto suburb, the small shelter provides a cozy and family-like environment for its residents. Rather than trying to pull them away from the streets and change them into model citizens, YWS acknowledges the positive elements of street life (for example, protection, friendship and honor) and provides both time and space for the youth to decide what he or she needs.

Throughout its existence, YWS has sought legitimacy from the formal child welfare system, the shelter network, and the Toronto public. Despite distinct internal structures, philosophies and outlooks, these two cases follow similar evolutionary processes.

### Organic Systems Within an Institutional Framework

Organizations are most often understood as organic creatures—composed of internal apparatuses and external environments. All organizations are dependent upon their environments and embedded within larger systems of relations. As illuminated by their respective local histories, CH and YWS did not remain isolated entities, rather, each functioned within various networks consisting of child welfare organizations, other youth shelters, adult shelters, Police, courts, hospitals, Probation and Parole, neighborhoods, and business sectors.

The life stories of CH and YWS reflect how organizations' internal operations shift and adapt in order to fit with external environment requirements. Both shelters survived tumultuous external (political and economic) landscapes as a result of smart management, that involved being flexible, adaptive and innovative. By acknowledging important evolutionary trends in the lives of CH and YWS, this analysis highlights the organic and flexible style of youth shelters - transforming the way in which they look and act in order to meet external realities.

As organic systems, organizations depend on their environment for two resource types—legitimacy and power; and productive resources (Handler, 1996). Legitimacy is gained by conforming to the dominant value system in the environment. Power refers to authority and influence within an organization. Productive resources include staff, clients and money (Hasenfeld, 1992). All organizations desire autonomy and a steady flow of resources; however, most environments are characterized by resource dependency. As such, organizations adopt strategies (e.g., cooperation or competition) to manage their environments (Hasenfeld, 1992). As will be discussed, the way in which CH and YWS have managed their environments is by accepting formal system clients. Recognition of legitimacy commands productive resources from the environment (money, legal authority, and

desirable clients) (Handler, 1996). Conformity to dominant cultural norms and belief systems becomes an essential characteristic of organizational behavior. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340): "Organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work . . . Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects . . ." Since social service agencies are engaged in moral work - conveying a judgment as to the moral worth of the client in terms of how he or she is treated, selected, processed and changed - they are consistently searching out moral legitimacy by adopting the dominant moral, cultural and belief symbols (Handler, 1996; Hasenfeld, 1992). The institutional perspective, which has been particularly salient in the study of human service organizations, argues that organizations mimic successful organizations in their sector through the adoption of rules, values, beliefs and cultural symbols. Strong forces of institutionalization work to reduce organizational diversity (Romanelli, 1991).

Within the culture of contracting, institutionalization explains the way by which organizations accrue legitimacy and thus obtain resources. Institutional mimicry is clearly evident in the world of youth shelters (and the youth-in-trouble network in general) in terms of bureaucratization (e.g., adopting standard accounting procedures) and professionalization (e.g., hiring fund-raisers, social workers and, executive directors who are management-focused). Organizations also develop institutional mindsets—commonly held assumptions as to how an organization should look and how its work should be performed (Handler, 1996, p. 98). For example, both shelters framed their work in professional terms such as counseling and case management which resembled formal child welfare practices. The shelters adopted technologies that are sanctioned by the institutional environment. For instance, during CH's middle years, numerous counseling programs (individual, group, psychiatric, and legal) emerged as well as distinct collaborative ventures with the Children's Aid Society (CAS) and the Police.

Institutional theorists argue that organizational behavior cannot be explained solely by market pressures, but also by institutional pressures (e.g., state regulations and social expectations)

(Greenwood and Hinings, 1996, p. 1025). Over time, institutional pressures lead to new organizations imitating dominant structures in a particular environment. Youth shelters were once specialized apparatuses which provided unique support to a particular population—CH was primarily a street kid agency and YWS acted as a refuge for youth with family or school problems. As my data indicate, both shelters are presently housing a different variety of youth—mirroring the various formal systems within their environments. Rather than being focused upon the short-term needs of clients, YWS and CH are now faced with residents' more in-depth biographies (Lefton and Rosengren, 1966), again reflecting the *modus operandus* of formal systems like the CAS, group homes, and psychiatric institutions. According to the institutional school, existing and dominant modes of thought and organization are consistently reproduced and reinforced (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996).

At the same time, organizations are by no means passive actors, rather, they help shape their environments. Blau and Scott (1962, p. 195) referred to organizations acting and reacting to their environments as "feedback processes." Organizations generally have the opportunity to choose various symbolic and cultural systems. According to Hasenfeld (1992, p. 11), organizations are "moral entrepreneurs"—seeking to influence the moral conception of their environments. Organizations are propelled by symbols—rituals, ceremonies, myths, stories and heroes. CH and YWS constructed the way in which they were perceived by other agencies, clients, and community members. Both shelters defined themselves as unique services. For example, CH made sure that YWS characterized itself as suburban in order to present a somewhat different appeal. Since youth shelters maintain elusive goals and achieve questionable effectiveness, the appearance of legitimacy and professionalism needs to be framed and exported. Both CH and YWS shed their alternative images and adopted professional characteristics in order to fit into their external environments. From its inception, the youth shelter has struggled to portray itself as a legitimate service provider rather than a flophouse. In doing so, the youth shelter has attempted to search out clients who meet this need for legitimacy. As evidenced in this analysis, youth shelters have moved away from serving hard-core

street kids in order to accommodate system-kids from the CAS, the Police, immigration centers and hospitals.

My analysis draws a distinction between street kids and system kids insofar as their past experiences are concerned. Street kids are characterized by their street experiences (for example, living on the street, squeegeeing, living in a squat, being involved in prostitution and drug use/sales, etc.). System kids are identified by their formal institutional involvement (for example, group homes, jail, immigration centers, mental health clinics, etc.). However, these categories are not mutually exclusive, since many street kids experience the formal child welfare system, and many system kids experience street life. Nonetheless, participants often made the distinction between these groups, noting that the youth shelter originally attracted adolescents directly from the street, rather than from other institutions. The fact that youth shelters now attract system kids can be viewed as a success story (i.e., this population is prevented from falling onto the streets [and thus becoming street kids]). Nevertheless, many shelter workers believed that their primary role should be to work with adolescents who lived on the street rather than adolescents who were being passed on from other organizations.

Youth shelters have shaped and have been shaped into an organizational form similar to a formal child welfare organization. The following sections provide an overview of the stages in CH's and YWS' evolution, and present an explanation regarding both shelters' transformations.

### Major Evolutionary Trends

#### *The Early Years*

In her exploration of an American Mid-West women's shelter, Hopkins (1983) identified several characteristics of alternative organizations including: limited resources, lack of social legitimacy, and hostile external environments. These characteristics are evident in YWS' and CH's evolution. In the early years, both YWS and CH struggled with securing external acceptance. For YWS, approximately four years were spent searching for a community to house its operation, political backing and financial support. CH had little difficulty developing its physical operation and gaining

political and financial commitments. However, the shelter was enmeshed in confrontations with the CAS, the Police and other social service agencies. For example, CH initially posed a threat to the CAS by accepting minors, and was quickly reprimanded (i.e., boycotted) by established organizations (the CAS and the Police). In turn, CH emphasized its unique focus upon street kids between the ages of 16 and 21.

Building relations with external institutions was viewed by both Agencies as a crucial tenet to successful implementation. YWS credits its existence to prominent allies in the local government and community. Each shelter engaged in active promotion of their operations to the public—emphasizing the urgent need for such a project; highlighting the scarcity of youth services in the neighborhood; and, quelling fears that such a house would attract “lazy bums” and criminal elements. YWS and CH described their residents as upstanding citizens who were experiencing difficult adolescent pains. Each shelter also promoted its respective operation as a highly structured and rule-oriented setting in which residents would have little time to relax, “goof-off,” or take advantage of the system. Both shelters clearly defended themselves from common perceptions of such organizations as being “crash pads.”

A defining characteristic of both YWS and CH during their respective early years was the claim of being a short-term, band-aid service. Residents of both establishments stayed an average of six to seven days; sufficient time for shelter workers to assess, counsel and refer. Throughout the 1980's, YWS and CH functioned at approximately 80% to 90% capacity, a comfortable zone in order for shelters to do their job with respect to staff-resident interaction, while maintaining bed availability for those who would need such services.

During the early years, both shelters' clientele were composed of hard-core street kids who were fleeing abusive families and/or street life. CH's and YWS' operational focus involved the provision of support and counseling for residents to procure employment, housing, and social services. The youth shelter of earlier days did not provide day programs (involving skills training, group therapy, and recreational activities). Instead, the early day environment of both YWS and CH was characterized by strict

adherence to a youth's plan of action (job and/or housing search) in order to quickly leave the emergency shelter. Youth shelters were initially devised of and operated as crisis centers—using such metaphors as “port-in-the-storm” and “emergency stop-over” for “cooling out” and “bandaging.” CH and YWS were not settings for long-term therapy—they were neither professionally nor organizationally equipped for such practices.

### *The Middle Years*

Hopkins (1983, p. 489) suggested that the survival of alternative organizations “. . . involves consistent growth and stability of the organization with the objective to become part of the established social service delivery network.” The local histories of CH and YWS support this claim. As both shelters evolved, the public's acceptance and support grew. CH emerged as an international social service leader in the field of youth homelessness, gaining much media attention and fundraising dollars. The community's perception of street kids also shifted in the late 1980's with the discovery that a majority of this population faced overwhelming experiences of sexual and/or physical abuse within the family, within state institutions, and on the street. CH was instrumental in educating the public regarding street youth characteristics (where they come from, what they look like, and what they do on the street). A more sympathetic and compassionate view of the street kid's plight grew from CH's active advertising campaigns.

During the late 1980's, YWS and CH experienced varying degrees of internal turmoil, including, a change of management teams, instability of front-line staff morale, shelter operation woes, financial hardships, and legal troubles with specific personnel. While YWS struggled primarily with funding issues (joining the Youth Shelter Network in order to advocate for increased government support), CH's greatest enemy appeared to be its own internal scandal (allegations that the executive director of its New York site had sexually abused several residents). Furthermore, CH experienced a reduction in the number of youth served (an average of 50 to 60 residents as opposed to its earlier average of 80). It explained the decrease in clientele as a result of two external occurrences—the advent of several new downtown youth shelters and increased welfare availability. CH became

concerned with its low census, so much so that it formed an internal sub-committee to investigate measures to attract more clients. The sub-committee recommended "reaching out to new clients" and "engaging youth to stay longer." Toronto Hostel Services suggested similar strategies to the debt-ridden YWS.

The middle years were critical in the youth shelters' evolutionary processes. While CH and YWS initially envisioned a somewhat different population than they actually served, each shelter soon filled up with a new type of hard-core problem youth. This population was made up primarily of CAS wards and graduates, the mentally ill, drug and alcohol abusers, and youth involved with the criminal justice system. The street kid as envisioned by CH and the youngster experiencing family/school problems as envisioned by YWS, now made up only a minority of each shelters' respective populations. Both shelters learned that their clientele were products of various other organizations working with troubled youth. In other words, youth shelters were not isolated entities with their own particular client base. Although servicing their new residents proved difficult, each shelter continued to maintain an external community to which it could refer. As such, up to the mid 1990's, CH and YWS remained short-term emergency crisis centers.

### *Present Day*

In the mid 1990's, YWS and CH experienced the fiscal constraints brought on by a tough-minded Ontario Conservative Government. During this period, welfare rates were slashed by over 20%; youth unemployment increased to 22%; and, eligibility to programs of assistance, benefits and/or shelter allowance was reduced (Yalnizyan, 1998). The cuts to social services directly impacted the youth shelter system in terms of a decrease in shelter *per diem* rates and the closure of many community agencies (job training projects, counseling services, group homes, and cooperative housing) that served as shelter referrals. Within the context of severe cutbacks, CH and YWS experienced crowded facilities as well as new types of residents. The demand on youth shelters rose by approximately 50% between 1993 and 1995, from an average daily occupancy of 200 from 1992 to 1994, to over 300 by 1995 (Metro Toronto Community Services, 1997). In order to

combat these hardships, both shelters turned inwards—focusing upon ways to survive and accommodate an emerging clientele. The results were almost synonymous: house rules and structures were reinvented; innovative programs developed; and, new relationships with residents forged. As such, both shelters underwent a metamorphosis—assuming new identities to accommodate a pressing resident population within a depressed social service sector environment.

Since the mid 1990's, CH and YWS were required to restructure internal shelter procedures—most significant, the short-term emergency focus shifted to a longer-term group home style setting: "So the emergency shelter has turned into, for some kids, an interim transitional housing base . . . We [CH] have obviously a more residential group home relationship with a lot of these kids . . ." (CH staff). According to workers, a short-term emergency crisis approach can only exist when there are external outlets to place clients who have been temporarily supported by the shelter. As both YWS and CH discovered, the mid 1990's resulted in shelters beginning to implode, since referral points were either full (with extensive waiting lists—up to ten months for a group home) or closed due to financial troubles. CH workers aptly defined the situation as a "bottle neck," implying a system that had become clogged. Rather than serving as an entry-point into the youth-in-crisis system, a role it had courageously played since inception, the youth shelter became, and continues to be, a final stop on the continuum.

Youth shelters also discovered that their in-house populations had radically changed. Rather than the tough, hard-core street kid/runaway/throwaway with whom shelters had been accustomed, the new shelter client is likely to be characterized by mental health issues, behavioral problems (aggressive and violent), drug and alcohol dependency, previous CAS involvement, and/or refugee/immigrant status. According to workers, the new population is a direct result of the dissipation of community mental health centers, CAS group homes and after-care support, detoxification centers and immigrant/refugee safe houses.

Over one-half of both shelters' populations had previous experience with the formal child welfare system, leading a CH middle level manager to note that youth shelters have become

"Children's Aid Societies for 16 year olds and up." A recent investigation of CAS graduates found that a majority of this population are experiencing poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, ill health, confusion and desperation (Martin, 1996). Characteristics of CAS-turned-shelter residents are as disquieting: "Kids coming out of any kind of system generally have no place to live, they don't have an education, they don't have any type of training, they can't get a job and they never had a job, and most can't read and all these things . . ." (CH staff). Accounts from both shelters' front-line staff suggest that this population, while being less street-entrenched, present disturbing behavioral and emotional problems as well as a lack of employment and life skills. Many workers believe that the new shelter population presents more intense and complex case management scenarios: ". . . So they're staying longer and they need higher support . . . more than just a bed, food, and a shower and some time to chill out . . ." (CH staff).

The shelter itself has had to alter some of its traditional procedures and structures in order to accommodate a population who inevitably is staying longer: "I think the program [YWS] has changed a bit, structures have changed. We're a little more lenient, more lenient on behavior type things, we're more flexible for kids who have been here for a long time" (YWS staff). CH, known for its strict and structured living arrangements (Karabanow, 1994) has recently extended its curfew and become less rigid with regards to traditional rules such as dress code, swearing, physical contact and alcohol/drug use. As noted by a CH middle level manager: "We've [CH] gone through an attempt at loosening up . . ." Traditional shelter plans involving strict job and housing searches have given way to more relaxed and "therapeutic" approaches to shelter life—group therapy, life skills, computer and employment training, and educational programs (such as English classes for immigrants and refugees). According to many youth workers, YWS was similarly perceived as a highly structured and rule-oriented setting where residents were expected to devote their energies towards their future plans. This short-term program philosophy has given way to the shelter's present perspective of long-term programming, involving day-long workshops that attempt to focus upon various needs. Rather than forcing residents

to be out of the shelter for the entire day (under the assumption that these adolescents were searching for jobs and/or housing), YWS' day program allows residents and ex-residents the opportunity to stay at the shelter during the day and learn about ". . . employment skills, housing options . . . how do you cook spaghetti, how do you do laundry, those are our basic life skills, then we go into anger management, conflict resolution . . . then we incorporate things like art day, sexual education issues . . ." (YWS staff).

Due to the present difficulties in obtaining outside services, front-line workers believe they have become more lenient and less quick to discharge residents for policy violations. As one front-line worker from CH noted: "I think we are a bit more understanding that there is a lack of services out there, so I think we can't have a kid go out after three months if there's nothing for them out there." As a result of the more relaxed and less pressured shelter environment, front-line workers also observe an emerging intimacy with residents. Previously perceived as policing youth, shelter workers now enjoy a more familiar and close relationship with clients—another characteristic found in the group home: "Kids are here [CH] so long, you can't not build a really deep relationship with them" (CH staff). Front-line workers define their work as "engaging" rather than "supervising" residents: "The issue became not how many applications did you put in for a job today, the issue became what can I teach you about finding a job or maintaining a job . . ." (CH staff). However, several workers have voiced the concern that youth shelters are now creating more dependent populations: "Separation is harder now and I think they [residents] grow a bit more dependent the more they are here, it's like their home away from home . . ." (CH staff). Most front-line workers agree that the longer the youth stay within the shelter setting, the greater the probability of becoming street-entrenched. An accepted yet unwritten dictum within shelter work is to move residents out of the shelter system as soon as possible—a feat becoming increasingly difficult.

### Understanding Organizational Change

Organizations, if viewed as natural systems, are governed by one overarching concern—survival (Tucker, House, Singh,

and Meinhard, 1984, p. 4). This section focuses upon CH's and YWS' survival within the youth-in-trouble network. Moreover, it attempts to answer the following questions raised in exploring these shelters' life stories: Why has CH and YWS strayed so drastically from their original mandates? Why are they not serving street youth anymore? If system-kids present such troubles, why have CH and YWS been so accommodating?

Both shelters commenced as novel services within environments lacking support for street youth. Initially, each shelter concentrated upon a broad range of clients (defined as "street youth" or "youth having difficulties") and multiple aspects of the client's biography (such as employment, housing, past history, education, etc.). One can understand this behavior as CH and YWS attempting to be recognized within their environments—by being everything to everyone. At the same time, neither shelter was interested in clients staying long-term. In the language of Lefton and Rosengren (1966), young organizations are characterized as having "lateral" (broad range) and "non-longitudinal" (short-term biographies) interests in their clients. These elements help organizations survive throughout the "liabilities of newness" (Rosengren, 1970, p. 121). CH and YWS employed a strategy to contend with their status as neophytes—make contacts and build social relations with numerous organizations (such as the CAS, the Police, Probation, and other youth shelters) in order to gain legitimacy and resources.

As both shelters evolved, their place within the youth-in-trouble network became more stable. With an increasing flow of clients, CH's and YWS' prediction of being needed came to fruition—both shelters had invested much effort to forge acceptance within their environments. In order to reduce uncertainties, CH and YWS increasingly adopted a more specific client focus (such as CAS-involved youth, refugees and immigrants) and more limited yet intense connections with various organizations (such as the CAS and Probation). Focusing upon a specific type of client (such as CAS graduates) or a specific aspect of the client (such as citizenship) allowed these young but evolving organizations to sell themselves as important and legitimate. CH and YWS were active beings interested in carving a niche for themselves within the youth-in-trouble network. In other words, as organi-

zations age, they inevitably become more specialized in order to survive within an environment characterized by increased organizational density (Rosengren, 1970). CH and YWS chose system kids rather than street kids because the former group provided more legitimacy as well as a stable flow of clients.

With a more specific client orientation, both shelters became more involved in their clients' biographical space. Their focus upon short-term emergency crisis care was reinvented along the lines of intermediary or long-term support. As CH and YWS evolved, they shifted towards an interest in the "non-lateral" (specific-focus) and "longitudinal" (long-term biography) client dimensions. From the organization's point of view, having specific types of residents staying longer creates a more stable internal environment (less intakes and discharges; more homogeneous populations) and a more legitimate external image ("we are important" and "we are needed") within its environment.

The drift from broad-focused and short-term interest in clients to more specific-focused and longer-term interest in clients, makes perfect sense. As young organizations, CH and YWS remained broadly-focused in order to gain clients and thus survive. They were testing a new technology—emergency crisis care for young people in a caring and supportive setting. Rather than remaining vulnerable to external contingencies (i.e., whether a runaway needed shelter), CH and YWS opened their doors to clients from various formal organizations (and allowed them to stay longer) in order to achieve what Rosengren (1970, p. 124) suggests as "predictability of future benefits or outcome." By forging relations with the formal system, both shelters gained a stable and long-term clientele.

An organization also benefits in terms of interventions with clients when they adopt a "non-lateral" and "longitudinal" arrangement. More stable populations (such as immigrant and refugee residents) provide calmer and easier work environments for staff as well as the chance to create more intimate staff-client attachments. While a number of front line workers described a more intense shelter environment at present, this situation could be explained as growing pains for both YWS and CH as they learn to cope with such changes (and retrain staff to deal with system kids). A focus upon specific clients and/or specific aspects of

the client requires less staff energies and shelter resources than a focus upon anyone who presents him/herself with any type of problem. It is more difficult, more demanding, and more costly for organizations to work on the "whole person" (i.e., converting the street kid to respectable citizen) rather than "technical" changes (i.e., gaining citizenship or providing educational services) (Rosengren, 1970, p. 125).

For the most part, front line workers noted that newer shelter populations were easier to handle on a hands-on basis (daily living), even though they present more complex case management issues (plan of action). For example, immigrants and refugees are generally highly motivated and rarely break house rules, despite nuisances for front line staff with respect to diverse languages and customs. On the other hand, shelter staff responsible for case management (primarily social workers at CH and case managers at YWS) are facing more intense episodes, dealing with areas such as immigration, mental illness, abuse, torture, violence and isolation/alienation. Nevertheless, more intimate client-worker relationships have formed at both shelters. Most workers described a less strict environment, with relaxed rules and structures. One could argue that these internal changes result from clients now being seen as more legitimate (and deserving), as well as a way in which these organizations can keep residents longer. Another way to look at this situation is to describe CH and YWS as becoming stricter towards traditional street youth, who are encountering less welcoming shelter practices (such as exceptionally long waiting lists).

Age leads organizations to develop a specific and long-term orientation towards clients. While neither YWS nor CH set out in this manner, the transformation (or drift) towards "non-laterality" and "longitudinality" can be justified as laying claims to a specific niche which insures clients, resources, and legitimacy. CH's and YWS' role as organizational settings for the interests of formal system players has ensured their survival within a turbulent youth-in-trouble network.

### Conclusion

CH and YWS are indeed products of their changing environments, shifting and transforming their internal and external

operations in order to adapt to their settings and provide the best services to those most in need. From an organizational point of view, CH and YWS made a conscious decision to provide long-term shelter to formal system youth rather than supporting their initial commitments (street kids). This shift in focus has everything to do with organizational survival.

Social work practice consists of both the passion of its front-line army and the rationality of the structures which house such work. In order to understand the mechanisms of social work practice, the ambiguity and complexity of these elements need to be explored. The case studies of CH and YWS act as microcosms for the struggles of human service organizations in general. It is important for those entering the field to be aware of such dynamics—perhaps then mitigating the ever-increasing levels of frustration, burnout, and value dissonance amongst social work practitioners.

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