



**The Bridge of Hope
Preventing Youth Homelessness for
Black and BIPOC Youth in Peel Region**

PROGRAM MODEL OVERVIEW

Acknowledgements

The Bridge of Hope program model overview was developed by REST Centres in partnership with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH). We acknowledge the many individuals and organizations who contributed to its development—including REST staff, youth participants, community partners, funders, and members of the Black and BIPOC communities in Peel Region.

Special thanks are extended to the youth with lived experience of homelessness whose insights and stories informed the design and evolution of the Bridge of Hope (BoH) program. Their perspectives continue to shape REST’s mission to build equitable, community-rooted solutions that prevent homelessness and promote belonging.

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REST Centres encourage the sharing and use of this program model overview to support learning, collaboration, and improved policy and practice related to youth homelessness prevention. It is our hope that the insights and approaches outlined here will contribute to stronger, more equitable housing systems and improved outcomes for Black and BIPOC youth.

To help ensure the integrity of this work is maintained, we ask that the following guidelines be respected:

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These guidelines are intended to support responsible sharing, protect the integrity of the model, and honour the contributions of youth, staff, and community partners who shaped this work.

Are you ready to transform your organization by implementing the Bridge of Hope program?

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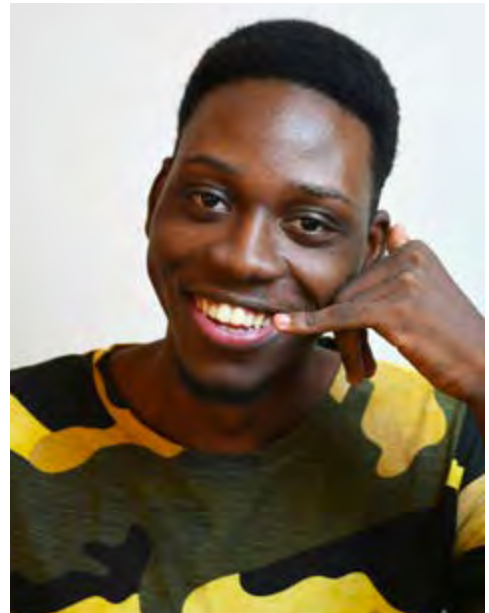
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1. Background

Youth homelessness represents a significant concern in Canada, with data from the 2020-2022 Nationally Coordinated Point-in-Time Counts revealing important trends about its scale and nature. Over 3,000 youth aged 13 to 24 were identified as experiencing homelessness, accounting for 12% of all respondents surveyed (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024). Notably, 44% of all respondents first experienced homelessness before age 25, suggesting that early experiences of housing instability often lead to chronic homelessness later in life (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024).

The population of youth experiencing homelessness is diverse in both composition and circumstances. **Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQI+ youth are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness, a disparity resulting from systemic racism, racialized discrimination, and homophobia** (Gaetz et al., 2016; Gaetz, 2014). Youth are primarily found in transitional housing (22%) and situations of hidden homelessness (17%), with 11% staying in shelters and 69% having used shelter services within the past year (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024).

The pathways into homelessness for youth differ notably from adults. Over half (51%) of youth cited interpersonal issues—particularly conflicts with parents—as the primary reason for housing loss, while financial issues (24%) and housing-related challenges (23%) were also significant factors (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024). Youth who have experienced foster care or youth group homes face particularly elevated risks, being three times more likely to experience homelessness as children (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024).



Health challenges are prevalent among youth experiencing homelessness, with **67% reporting mental health issues, 56% experiencing substance use concerns, and 47% facing learning or cognitive limitations** (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024). While youth are currently less likely than older groups to experience chronic homelessness (58% compared to 71%), chronic homelessness among youth has increased from 53% in 2018, and early experiences of homelessness significantly increase the risk of chronic housing instability (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2024).

Understanding the Causes of Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness results from a combination of structural, systemic, and individual factors (Gaetz & DeJ, 2017; Gaetz, 2014; Springer et al., 2013). These factors interact and shape youth homelessness in Canada.

1. Structural Factors

Structural factors include broad systemic, economic, and societal issues contributing to youth homelessness. Examples of structural factors include a lack of affordable housing, poverty, discrimination (i.e., based on young people's social identities such as age, race, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and gender expression as well as addiction, mental and physical health challenges), and experience of violence and intergenerational trauma (Grattan et al., 2022; Morton, 2020; Hasford et al., 2018).



2. Systemic Factors

Systemic factors create barriers for youth in receiving services, supports, and resources from government and not-for-profit entities (Gaetz & DeJ, 2017). **Institutional and system failures are some of the main determinants of youth homelessness in Canada.** Studies show that a considerable number of youth currently experiencing homelessness were previously incarcerated (Goyette et al., 2022; Infrastructure Canada, 2022). To expand, many young people experience homelessness when they are discharged from institutions, such as child protection agencies and foster homes, typically at the age of 18.

3. Individual Factors

Individual factors that often contribute to homelessness include family issues (Grattan et al., 2022; Kull et al., 2019), interpersonal issues, such as mental health and/or addiction challenges (Grattan et al., 2022; Schwan et al., 2018), involvement with the criminal justice system, and dropping out of school (Gaetz, 2014). Family issues encompass a variety of challenges, including conflict among family members (Abramovich, 2020; Grattan, et al., 2022; Saladanha & Raymond, 2019), experience of physical, sexual or emotional abuse and violence in the home, and family breakdown (Grattan et al., 2022).



Anti-Black Racism, Discrimination, and Pathways into Youth Homelessness

Systemic discrimination and anti-Black racism contribute to pathways into homelessness for Black youth in Canada (O’Grady et al., 2011; Springer et al., 2013). This is reflected in the over-representation of Black youth in the youth justice system and in the discriminatory practices within it (Okonta, 2022). The racial profiling and discrimination faced by Black individuals during police interactions in Ontario are well documented (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). In Peel Region, Black youth have reported racial profiling and negative encounters with the Peel Regional Police in research findings (Social Planning Council of Peel, 2015).

Black youth are also overrepresented in Ontario’s child welfare system, with the proportion of Black children in foster care being 2.2 times higher than their share of the child population in the province (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). **Black children are particularly overrepresented in admissions to care** and account for 30% of children in care across children’s aid society agencies (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018b). The intervention of child welfare agencies can be harmful, as it can disrupt and undermine the parent-child bond for Black youth and their families (Price, 2023).

Black youth and young adults also face discrimination in the classroom and in the workplace. Black students in the greater Toronto area are more likely to “be academically streamed into work-related courses, suspended or expelled, and drop out of school without graduating” (Family Services of Peel, 2023). In 2021, Black Canadians aged 25 to 45 were more likely to hold a bachelor’s degree or higher (41.1%) than Canadians in the same age group who are not racialized or Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2023). Despite having a generally higher level of education, 13% of Black Canadians reported experiencing workplace discrimination, compared to 6% of the rest of the population (Statistics Canada, 2020). This data shows that **the Black community faces unique barriers to employment** that are not present in other communities.

Lastly, Black immigrants encounter additional challenges when seeking employment, such as discrimination against foreign accents, difficulty adapting to unfamiliar workplace cultural norms, the lack of Canadian work experience, and the non-recognition of previous education, work experience, and other credentials (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Rental Inquiry Data Shows Clear Discrimination, Underscoring the Need for Proactive Landlord Engagement

Racial discrimination continues to be a significant barrier in Toronto's rental market that particularly impacts Black tenants in their search for housing. Despite legal protections, Black renters often face systemic biases that hinder their access to desirable properties.

A study by Akaabre et al. (2025) investigating anti-Black discrimination in Toronto's rental market found that **only 60.7% of Black applicants received a positive response to rental inquiries** compared to 72.5% from white-presenting applicants. This 11.8% gap in positive responses translates to thousands of lost housing opportunities for Black people.

These findings highlight the need for Canada to take a closer and more honest look at how racial bias continues to shape access to housing. Addressing these barriers will require stronger and more consistent action, including better enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws, routine checks of rental practices, and practical training for landlords to help recognize and reduce bias.



Programs like Bridge of Hope play a critical role by cultivating trusted relationships with landlords, serving as intermediary leaseholders, and setting clear expectations around equity, accountability, and tenant support. By shifting risk away from individual youth and embedding anti-discriminatory practice into housing acquisition, proactive landlord engagement becomes a necessary intervention to counter systemic bias and expand equitable access to housing for Black and BIPOC youth.



2. Overview: What Is the Bridge of Hope Program?

“REST gave me more than shelter—it gave me the belief that change was possible.” - Bridge of Hope Program Participant

The Bridge of Hope (BoH) program is REST Centres’ flagship initiative. It is designed to prevent youth homelessness by supporting BIPOC youth aged 16 to 24 in Peel Region, Ontario, and helping them to access and sustain safe, affordable housing.

The Bridge of Hope program primarily partners with local landlords to provide rental spaces, serving as a bridge to offer youth access to respectful and dignified shelter. This innovative approach thoughtfully links young tenants with landlords to cultivate a caring, supportive living environment beyond a typical landlord-tenant arrangement. BoH seeks to instill a sense of community, stability, and family support for youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The program addresses the intersection of systemic racism, poverty, and housing inequity that contributes to disproportionate rates of homelessness among Black and racialized youth. Through a culturally grounded approach inspired by the principles of Housing First for Youth, BoH helps young people secure stable housing and provides wraparound supports that promote well-being, skill development, and independence.

Rest History

How Did the BOH Program That Rest Offers Today Begin?

1. The Beginning

- Student Research
- Needs Assessment
- Business Planning
- Passionate Volunteers
- Oversight board
- Lived Experience
- Engaged Landlords
- Relationship with Peel CAS
- Preliminary Life Skills
- Wrap around supports
- Funding
- First Case Manager

2. Pandemic (Growth)

- Introduction of Bare Necessities, Life Skills, Mental Health, Food Security
- Rebranding (B3)

3. Today

- Strengthening Programs
- Mississauga Expansion
- Research
- Evaluation
- Data Management Systems
- Internal Structures
- Policy/Procedure Documentation
- Staff Capacity Building
- FIRM, HERO, LIFE
- Exploring new models (landlord)

4. Future Goals

- Housing provider
- Leadership social enterprise
- Transitional housing / support
- Strengthened youth council
- Employment / Entrepreneurship Programs
- Financial Independence
- Expanded recreational programs

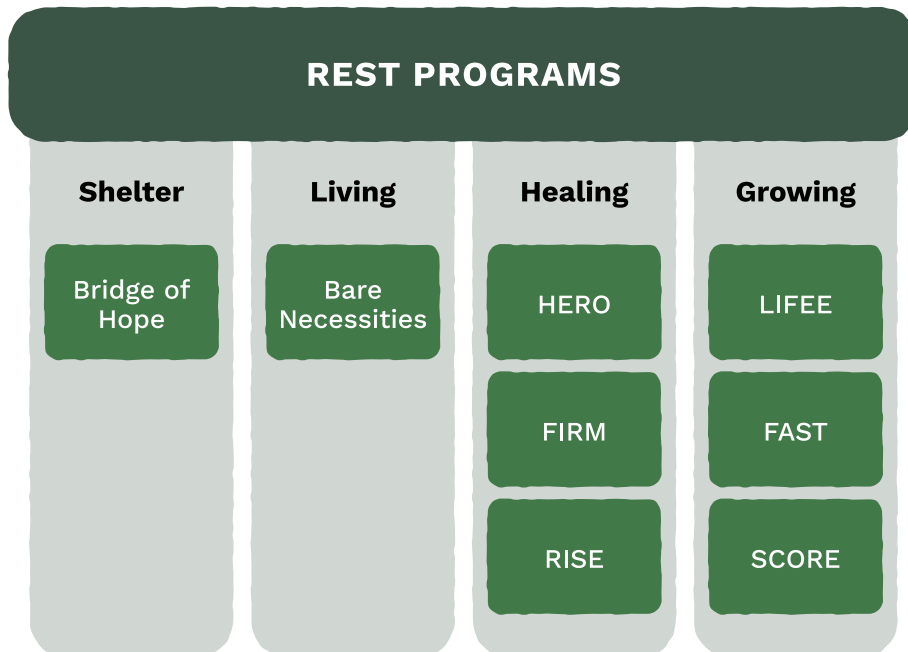
Originally launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to address urgent housing needs, the BoH program has grown into a comprehensive, community-driven model. REST operates both standard leases, where youth sign directly with landlords, and a head-lease model, where REST serves as the primary leaseholder and subleases to youth. While both are used, REST is increasingly shifting toward the head-lease model as its core approach to reduce landlord barriers and strengthen housing stability, continuity, and support for youth.

In 2025, REST Centres achieved a major milestone by launching the first Black youth-serving house, “REST House.” Through this initiative, REST is the property owner and provides housing for homeless and at-risk Black youth, prioritizing individuals identified through the Region of Peel’s By-Name List.

The BoH program is at the core of REST’s mission to end Black youth homelessness and dismantle systemic barriers by creating pathways to stability, independence, and community connection.

About REST Centres Programming

REST operates programming under four pillars: Shelter, Living, Healing, and Growing.



Shelter

The **Bridge of Hope program** falls under the first pillar, Shelter. Shelter is a fundamental human right. We work on the premise that youth are in a better position to move forward with their lives when they have stable housing. This means working quickly to secure safe, affordable, and sustainable housing, with ongoing support to maintain their tenancies, as the first step in our holistic approach. Focus areas include:

- **Transitional Housing**
- **Applicant Assistance**
- **Eviction Prevention**
- **Landlord Training and Support**



Living

The Living pillar supports youth through **the Bare Necessities (BN) Program**, which offers financial aid for food, nutritional support, emergency food assistance, and rental subsidies along with household starter packs to ensure stability and well-being.

Healing

Healing is essential for youth to build resilience, emotional strength, and lasting well-being. Through the **HERO (Healing Emotional Recovery and Opportunity) program**, youth receive trauma-informed mental health support that nurtures emotional and physical wellness.

The RISE (Recreation Inspiring Social Engagements) program promotes holistic development through recreational activities that foster leadership, teamwork, and healthy habits.

Recognizing the benefits of a safe and stable family environment, **the FIRM (Family Intervention and Reunification Management) program** provides family-centred interventions that promote reunification and help establish positive home environments.

These programs support youth in healing from trauma, building supportive relationships, and developing essential lifelong coping and wellness skills.

Growth

Empowering youth with confidence and tools is essential for their economic and social success. Through our **LIFEE (Learning Initiatives Fostering Economic Empowerment) program**, we prepare youth for career success by providing skills training and employment readiness support.

FAST (Fostering Abilities and Skills for Tomorrow) helps youth develop essential independent living skills such as budgeting and home management.

SCORE (Social Cultural Opportunities and Restorative Engagements) promotes cultural identity, community connections, and prosocial behaviours, helping youth to create positive and purpose-driven futures.

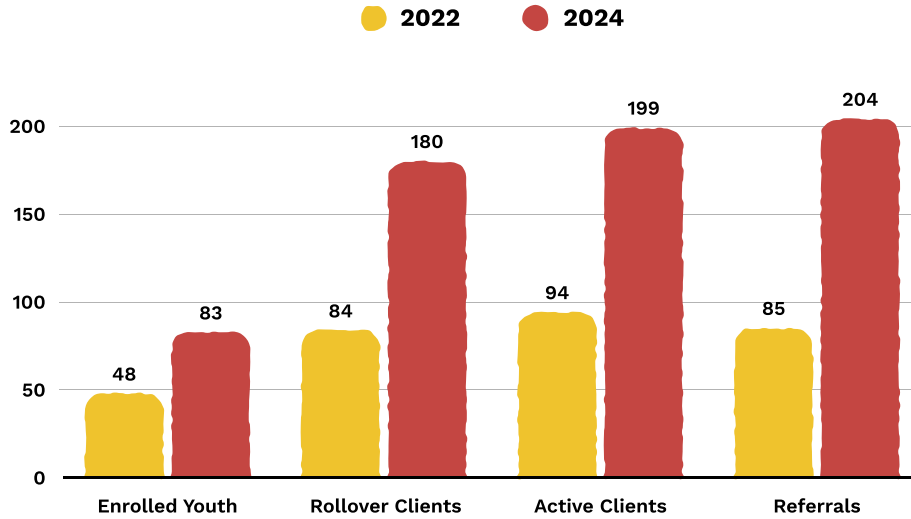
Together, these programs lay the foundation for long-term independence, economic stability, and a strong sense of self.

[Visit REST Centres' website for more information →](#)

Bridge of Hope Impact Snapshot

REST Centre’s Bridge of Hope model proves that culturally responsive, community-rooted interventions can achieve measurable outcomes in reducing Black youth homelessness.

Impact Highlights (2022–2024)

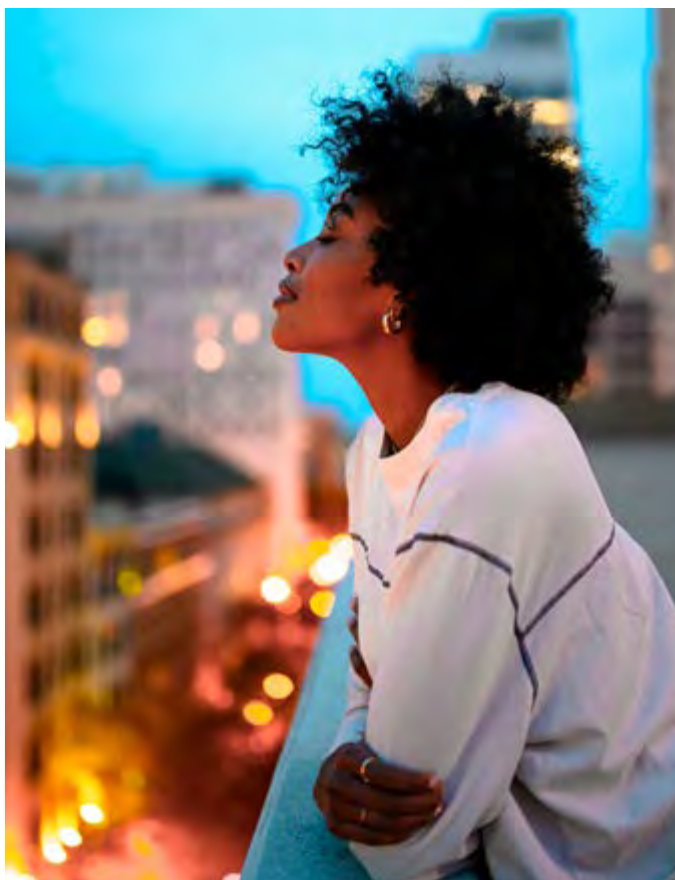


Indicator	2022	2024	Growth	Significance
Rollover Clients	84	180	+114%	Youth who continued receiving case management support year over year.
Referrals	85	204	+140%	Youth who were referred by agencies or self-referred.
Enrolled Youth	48	83	+73%	Youth formally accepted into the program & receiving case management support.
Active Clients	94	199	+112%	Youth housed and receiving case management support during the year, including rollover clients.

The increase in enrolled youth represents the increase in program capacity, while the number of active clients and rollover clients speaks to the ongoing commitment made to young people to support their housing stability long term. Critically, the increase in referrals is a sign of the growing importance and awareness of the BoH program in the community and the trust other agencies place in it.

2024 Cross-Program Impacts

- **199 active youth** receiving case management related to housing and rental subsidy support (237% increase).
- **96% satisfaction** with rent subsidy program and 91% with case management.
- **134 clients** supported with regular grocery cards to fight food insecurity.
- **99 youth** engaged in skill development workshops on finance, entrepreneurship, and trades.
- **62 youth** received culturally sensitive counselling through HERO (Healing Emotional Recovery and Opportunity).
- **59 youth** trained in tenant rights and advocacy; 39 in financial literacy; 96 in conflict management and emotional intelligence.



3. Goals and Objectives of the Bridge of Hope Program

The Bridge of Hope program is designed to address both immediate housing crises and the long-term structural inequities that drive homelessness among Black youth. Housing instability does not occur in isolation—it is the product of systemic racism, economic marginalization, and institutional barriers that limit access to safe housing, employment, and education.

Program Goal

The BoH program's goal is to prevent and end youth homelessness among Black youth by combining safe, stable housing with holistic, culturally responsive supports that promote well-being, independence, and community connection.

Program Objectives

Housing Stability

Support youth in securing and maintaining safe, affordable, and sustainable housing.

Cultural Responsiveness

Deliver programs that are grounded in anti-Black racism and anti-oppression frameworks.

Wraparound Support

Offer holistic services to address the youth's emotional, physical, educational, and employment needs.

Youth Empowerment

Foster youth leadership, voice, and agency in all aspects of program design and implementation.

Community Integration

Strengthen youth connections to peers, family, and community resources.

Systemic Change

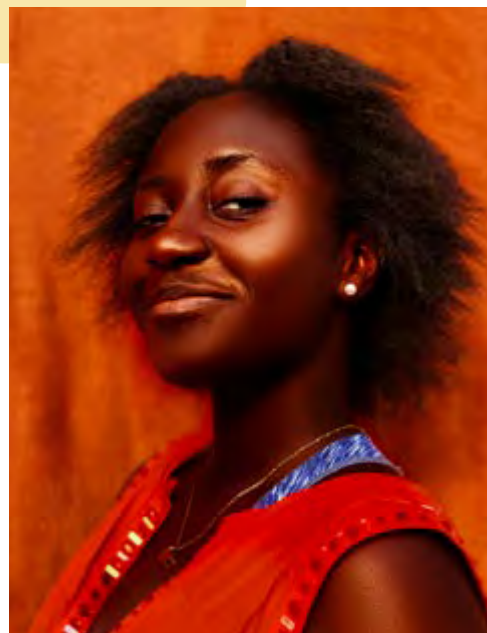
Influence policy and systems change to advance housing equity for Black and racialized youth.

Tayjha's Story

Bridge of Hope Program Participant

“REST Centres saw my potential, not my background. Today, I’m living my dream—safe, stable, and building my future.” — Tayjha

Tayjha’s story reflects the challenges many Black youth encounter when trying to find safe and stable housing. Despite working full time, her credit history and age made landlords reluctant to rent to her. However, her situation improved when she connected with REST Centres through the Bridge of Hope program. With the assistance of the landlord engagement coordinator, Janin, Tayjha was able to secure her first home—a place she could truly call her own. A year later, she moved into a long-term unit, describing the experience as “life-changing” and a significant turning point toward stability and independence.



4. The Approach

The Bridge of Hope program operates at the intersection of evidence, community experience, and cultural wisdom. Its approach draws on established frameworks such as Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) and incorporates REST's unique strengths as a Black-led, community-driven organization.

The BoH approach ensures that housing is not treated as a standalone outcome but as part of a larger continuum of care that supports the whole person—spiritually, emotionally, and materially.

Frameworks Guiding the Bridge of Hope Model

- **Housing First for Youth (HF4Y):** BoH is grounded in the HF4Y philosophy, which upholds the right to housing without pre-conditions and emphasizes youth choice, strengths-based support, and community integration.
- **Culturally Responsive Practice:** The model is tailored to the realities of Black and racialized youth. It recognizes the impacts of anti-Black racism, colonization, and systemic exclusion, and embeds healing, identity affirmation, and empowerment throughout all services.
- **Integrated Wraparound Model:** BoH operates within REST's wider ecosystem of programs—such as Bare Necessities, HERO, LIFE, FIRM, and RISE Above—to ensure that every youth's physical, emotional, and social needs are addressed.
- **Collaborative partnerships with local agencies:** BoH promotes cross-referrals and collaborations with local agencies to enhance services and support for youth.
- **Collaboration and engagement with landlords:** BoH staff build meaningful partnerships with landlords to provide housing for youth.

Together, these frameworks create a model that is adaptable, evidence-informed, and rooted in community trust.



Housing First for Youth & Cultural Safety

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) offers a strong foundation, but its implementation often lacks the cultural specificity needed to effectively serve Black Youth. REST's model fills this critical gap.



Core HF4Y Principles

- Immediate access to permanent housing
- Youth choice and self-determination
- Individualized and flexible support
- Social and community integration

REST's Cultural Safety Integration

- Anti-racism training for all partners
- Cultural upholding and peer support
- Trauma-informed understanding of racial trauma
- Strengths-based approach honoring cultural assets

Integrating cultural safety in Housing First makes it possible for young people to develop with respect, connection, and real support that values their whole identity and experience.

5. Core Principles of the Bridge of Hope Program

REST Centres' principles are the foundation of the Bridge of Hope program. They reflect a balance between evidence-based practice and community values, ensuring that every aspect of implementation—from intake to aftercare—centres the dignity and leadership of youth. The program's core principles include:

Right to Housing

Access to housing is unconditional and foundational to well-being.

Cultural Safety

All services are grounded in an understanding of anti-Black racism and cultural identity, ensuring youth feel seen and respected.

Youth Choice and Voice

Youth guide their housing and support plans, exercising agency and leadership.

Wraparound Support

Supports are holistic, integrating mental health, education, employment, and life skills.

Positive Youth Development

Programming builds resilience, confidence, and leadership capacity.

Community and Belonging

Connection to peers and mentors fosters long-term inclusion.

Evidence and Accountability

Ongoing data collection and evaluation inform improvement and fidelity.

Landlord Training and Recognition

Equipping landlords with tools, training, and incentives to support youth and promote equity.

6. How the Bridge of Hope Program Works

“The program taught me a lot about renting from outsiders and things I need to know if I’m looking for a house... I feel it’s something young people need to know about, in case for the future.” - Bridge of Hope Program Participant

The Bridge of Hope program moves beyond crisis response to provide a continuum of supports that meet youth where they are. From outreach to aftercare, REST’s BoH model combines practical housing solutions with emotional, relational, and educational supports that help youth build sustainable futures.

STEP 1

Outreach and Intake

Youth are referred to REST through schools, shelters, community agencies, children’s aid societies, or word-of-mouth. REST’s outreach workers engage youth directly, explain available services, and assess immediate needs.

STEP 2

Needs Assessment and Planning

Each youth undergoes a comprehensive needs assessment conducted by a case manager. This process covers housing history, personal goals, mental health, education, and employment.

Following the assessment, the case worker or program support worker conducts an in-person interview with the prospective participant. The purpose of the interview is to evaluate the youth’s suitability for relevant REST programs, conduct a financial assessment of their current situation, and determine the next steps in the process. The interview takes place in a comfortable environment.

STEP 3

Housing Access and Placement

A housing outreach coordinator assists youth in finding housing in the private rental market.

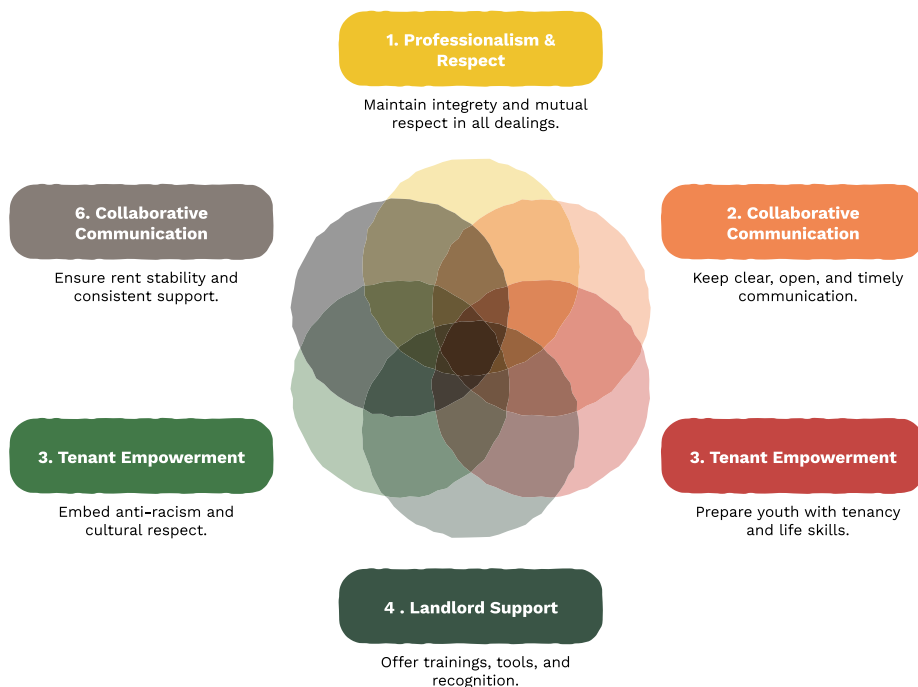
REST secures rental units through organizational leases and, when appropriate, subleases them to youth or co-signs rental agreements. This approach ensures housing quality, protects youth from discrimination, and provides REST with the flexibility to negotiate rent and terms.

Deidra's Story

Bridge of Hope Landlord

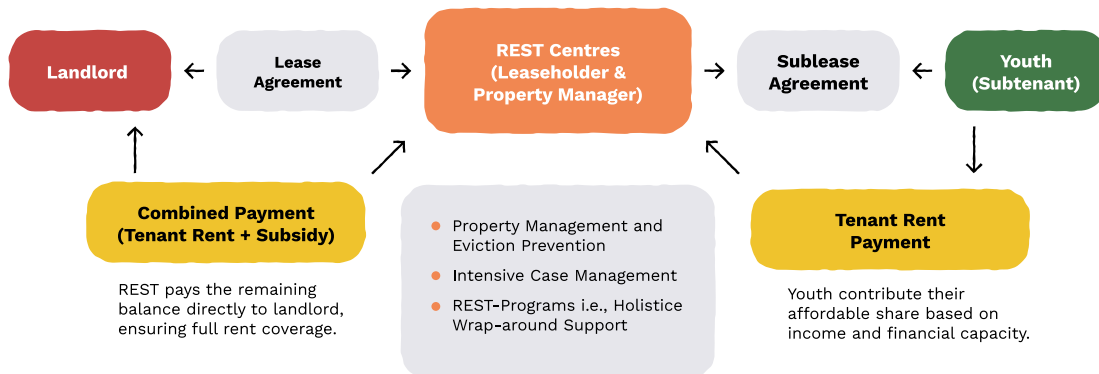
Deidra's experience highlights how REST's landlord engagement model fosters mutual trust and transforms relationships within the community. While renting out a suite in her home, Deidra was connected to a young tenant through REST and witnessed the positive impact of stable housing firsthand. Her tenant, who was once at risk of homelessness, is now thriving, enrolled in school, and pursuing a diploma in police foundations. Deidra's experience demonstrates how culturally affirming landlord engagement benefits both youth and property owners. It enhances dignity and stability while promoting a shared sense of purpose, ultimately strengthening community ties and social responsibility.

REST Model: Landlord Engagement Core Principles



REST Leasehold Model: Landlord and Tenant Engagement

This model recognizes that many youth experiencing homelessness are not “housing ready” by traditional standards.



Process

- 1. Landlord Engagement:** REST identifies properties and engages receptive landlords.
- 2. Head Lease:** REST signs a master lease, taking legal responsibility.
- 3. Youth Sublease:** Units subleased to youth with supports to build rental history and independence.
- 4. Training:** Landlord and tenant training reduces risks and evictions.
- 5. Transition:** Youth gain tenancy, life, mental health, social integration and employment skills under REST’s oversight, easing their move to independent housing and self-growth.



STEP 4**Wraparound Supports**

Once a youth is enrolled in the program, a case worker or program support worker will meet with them to develop a personalized care plan. This care plan focuses on the individual needs and goals of the youth, such as education, financial stability, and employment. The plan is regularly evaluated and revised to ensure it continues to meet the unique needs of the youth.

Youth receive individualized supports through REST's suite of programs:

- **Bare Necessities:** Provides food, hygiene, and essential household supplies.
- **HERO (Healing, Emotional Recovery and Opportunity):** Offers therapy and wellness workshops.
- **LIFE (Learning Initiative Fostering Employment):** Delivers employment support, financial literacy, and life skills training.
- **FIRM (Family Intervention and Reunification Management):** Focuses on family mediation and reconnection.
- **RISE Above:** Creates access to recreation and community engagement activities.

Youth also become part of an intensive case management process, involving regular meetings with youth and case conferences with appropriate stakeholders.

STEP 5**Monitoring and Evaluation**

Case managers conduct regular check-ins to monitor housing stability, progress toward goals, and emerging needs. REST's data management system captures outcomes and supports continuous learning.

STEP 6

Transition and Aftercare

Youth graduate from the Bridge of Hope program upon successfully completing the goals and tasks outlined in their care plan. Graduation occurs after they achieve several months of independent living and financial stability. The timeline for graduation may vary depending on each youth's individual needs.

An exit plan is developed with the youth, detailing strategies to support them in maintaining independent living after leaving the program.

When the youth are ready to transition, REST provides assistance with move-out support, budgeting, and housing searches. Additionally, post-program follow-up ensures continued stability and connection to the community.



7. Implementation Readiness

Effective implementation demands a combination of skilled personnel, partnerships, and infrastructure. Each Bridge of Hope site or replication effort must ensure readiness in four key areas: staffing, partnerships, funding, and evaluation systems.

Core Implementation Requirements

Staffing

- One case manager per 25 youth, supported by administrative and outreach staff.
- Staff trained in trauma-informed care, cultural competence, and youth development.

Partnerships

- Formal collaborations with children's aid services, landlords, housing providers, and mental health agencies.
- Engagement with local, Black-led organizations for culturally aligned support.

Funding

- Rental subsidies and program funds to cover lease costs, basic needs, and staff salaries.
- Sustainable funding models, including government grants and community contributions.

Evaluation

- A centralized database to track outputs and outcomes.
- Annual fidelity reviews to maintain quality and consistency across implementations.

Fostering Meaningful Partnerships with Landlords

The Bridge of Hope program involves two types of landlords:

1. **Community Landlords:** These landlords list their properties for rent on public platforms, such as rental market advertisements, and partner with REST.
2. **Bridge Builders:** These are homeowners who do not publicly list their properties but partner with REST to provide housing for youth. REST actively seeks out Bridge Builders through outreach and advocacy initiatives.

When a housing outreach worker first meets with any landlord, they explain REST's expectations and discuss the types of housing that are unacceptable for the program, including illegal basements, properties lacking fire safety, and rooms without locks. This initial conversation, along with home assessments, helps to build a strong relationship between REST and the landlords.

The program provides structured training and ongoing support for landlords through regular check-ins, follow-ups, and training sessions. The primary goal of these support services is to enhance landlords' understanding of how to assist youth with complex needs. Thanks to this support, many homeowners actively participate in the program and contribute to the positive development of the youth involved. Landlords often waive background checks, reference checks, and credit score assessments for youth participating in the program. This cooperation helps eliminate barriers to securing housing.

The program maintains open communication, allowing landlords to reach out to the staff whenever they face a challenge or issue. This communication line plays a crucial role in preventing evictions.

“The landlords know that they have access to us if there’s any problems. Landlords have direct access to calling us with any problems that they have. Part of our strategy is if [landlords] have any issues with the youth, [we ask them to] give us an opportunity to work with the youth rather than saying, ‘Okay, I’m cutting in [and] I want you [youth] out of my place.’ So, it’s an eviction prevention strategy, and we found that it works well.” — REST staff member

Additionally, REST invites landlords to various community events to build and strengthen relationships. They also provide tokens of appreciation, such as a turkey at Christmas time, to nurture these connections.

Ready to bring the Bridge of Hope program model into your organization or community?

REST Centres has identified four distinct scaling models for expanding the Bridge of Hope program. Each model is designed to respond to different contexts, partner capacities, and market conditions, allowing for flexible, strategic growth.

1. Contract Delivery / Fee for Service

In this model, REST delivers the Bridge of Hope program directly on a contract basis. A partner organization or funder engages REST to deliver the program within their community or jurisdiction, with REST maintaining full responsibility for facilitation and outcomes. This approach is well-suited to situations where a partner lacks internal delivery capacity but has the resources to fund external expertise.

2. Licensed / Subscription Model

This model follows a “train the trainer” approach, in which REST builds the capacity of a partner organization to deliver the program independently on an ongoing basis. REST provides initial training and continuing support, while the partner assumes primary responsibility for facilitation. This model enables broader reach with lower long-term resource demands on REST and is ideal for partners with strong organizational infrastructure and motivation for sustained delivery.

3. REST Expansion Model

Under this model, REST enters a new market as a whole organization — extending its direct presence and operations into a new geography or community. REST retains full organizational responsibility for program delivery and maintains its existing governance and operational structure. This approach ensures fidelity to the program model but requires significant organizational investment.

4. REST Expansion Through Separate Legal Entities (“Franchise”)

In this model, a new REST Centre is established as an independent legal entity in a new market. The new organization operates under the REST name and brand, adhering to defined program standards and subject to certain quality controls, but is governed and managed independently. This franchise-style approach allows for locally rooted leadership while maintaining alignment with REST’s values and methodology.

8. Conclusion

“[Youth] need an organization like [REST Centres] and this type of program. It’s hard to find these type of supports.” - Bridge of Hope Program Participant

The Bridge of Hope program represents a powerful model of culturally responsive prevention. By integrating housing, wraparound supports, and identity-affirming care, REST Centres is transforming the landscape of youth homelessness prevention in Peel Region and beyond.

Bridge of Hope demonstrates that when youth are given the foundation of stable housing and the tools to thrive, they not only rebuild their own futures—they help reshape systems toward equity and justice.



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