



**HOMELESS IN KENORA**  
**Volume X**  
**Youth In Transition Stories**  
**2017**

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# Homeless in Kenora: Transitional Aged Youth



Stories of Our Emerging Adults and  
Their Challenge To Find Home



Making Kenora Home thanks all of the young people who opened up their lives for the purpose of raising awareness of the faces behind the statistics. It is through their courage that we will develop understanding of their reality. It is through hope that we will dedicate our understanding to becoming part of the solution to the issues that affect emerging adults within our community. It is through commitment that we will show that

***“Kenora Cares”***

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Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being.

Albert Schweitzer



“Often it isn’t the initiating trauma that creates seemingly insurmountable pain, but the lack of support after.”

(S. Kelley Harrell, Gift of the Dreamtime - Reader's Companion)

## Jordon

I am 22 years old and have lived here all my life except for when I was sent away to group homes and other types of places. I was in and out of children’s aid care since I was 19 months old. My parents are addicted to alcohol and solvents. I’m working on my own alcohol addiction. I’ve cut back to drinking about 3 times a week instead of every day. That’s an accomplishment for me.

I’m on Ontario Works. They are helping me to get onto disability. It’s discouraging though. I took the form to the doctor who asked why because I seemed like a smart young man. What do you say to that? Disabilities don’t always stick out like a stamp on your forehead!



I’ve been homeless. Right now I’m staying in the transitional program at the Fellowship but I want a place of my own. I’ve never had that. I counted up my placements and I was in over 28 places by the time I was 18. It was fill up a garbage bag and move on to the next place.

Child agency services end at 18. My worker got me out of jail just before I turned 18. They put me into a hotel because there was no place for me. I sat in that hotel room, scared about my future. I had no place to go. I had good street skills but no life skills. I got handed \$750 and was set up in a place. Of course I blew all the money on booze each month and got kicked out because I didn’t pay the rent so I have been bouncing around since. I’ve been on my own for four years now.

Growing up was mostly bad. Once in awhile I get a good worker or a good foster home but it never lasted. I remember when I was six years old. I was going to meet another foster family. I put on my best clothes and made sure I was clean and well behaved so they would like me. The family sure seemed good while the worker was there and it started out not too bad. I have FASD and ADHD together. That means it was hard to meet people's standards. When you didn't, they found ways to hurt you or they just sent you away. At this house, if I was having a tantrum they would put me in the bedroom and slid a piece of board over the doorway so I couldn't get out. You are not allowed to lock foster kids in their rooms but the board did the same thing. These foster parents would have me standing in a corner for hours and half the time I didn't know what I had done wrong. Sometimes they would run ice cold baths and throw me in as punishment. I was 6 years old and didn't understand that they didn't have the right to do this stuff. Workers kept changing so it's not like you'd trust them enough to tell them what was really happening. This family is still working as foster parents. They see me and talk so nice as if none of the bad stuff ever happened. They even ask me to come over for a visit. I don't go.



By the time I was a teenager, I was mad all the time. It just filled me up and spilled over into where ever I was at. I moved into a home with my older and younger brother. This foster family was nice. I liked the way they were but after 3 years, they had enough of my anger. I don't blame them.

Placements that I liked never lasted. I'd pack garbage bags and move to the next place. I was sent to a group home down in Southern Ontario and was doing okay. It was like this little town of group homes with a school and other group homes that were located away from the property. Even two of my brothers were there. We weren't sent there to be together, it was just where each of us got sent. We all were put into different houses and couldn't visit unless the staff allowed it. Since we all went to the same school, it was our best chance to be together. I used to get in trouble for trying to protect my little brother. At the school, I would hear the teacher ragging on my brother and would step in. They didn't like that much. Soon I got sent to one of the off site group homes and away from my brothers. I am still away from my brothers. All 5 of us live in different places today.

income place but it was still hard. I had \$800 for start up funding but that wasn't much. I got a futon instead of a bed but there was so much more that I needed-pots and pans and blankets and towels and furniture of any kind. The money didn't last long no matter how I tried. I worked a job but had to take a cab to get there. Because my shifts were only 4 hours, I hardly made any money at all.

There was a guy who lived in the building that gave me the creeps. He was always after something from me and was scared. Because I didn't even have a phone, I knew that I couldn't call 911 for help. I felt so alone. I finally moved out but then my rent used up all my money. I member going to the Salvation Army for a food hamper. They looked at my rent receipt which was \$630, they looked at my cheque which was \$680 and then they looked at me and asked, "How are you making it on this every month". I really hate asking for help-ever but it seems that that's what I kept having to do. Now that I'm older, I know some of the places where I can get help but when I was a teenager, I didn't know anything.



I quit school because I got tired of being bullied. Two girls in particular used to go after me. Quitting wasn't good, but I just couldn't take it anymore. Since then, I have been too busy raising my family and just surviving so I have never gone back to finish school. Maybe someday.

I could have used help when I was first on my own. There are so many things that you just don't know how to do. Money and transportation were my biggest problem and still are. I have a hard time budgeting. That was one thing that would have made a big difference-being able to budget. I wish that I had been taught it before I left care.



## **Backpack Facts**

### ***Criminal Victimization***

***68.7% victimized within a year***

***31% have been in sex trade***

***The National Youth Homelessness Survey 2014***

I have a worker who is trying to help. He watched me just lie on the couch from morning until night. He tries to get me to do something but I keep going over so much in my head that there is no energy to do anything. He did get me back to snowboarding which is good.


When I am snowboarding, I feel free. I am good at it. I have been sponsored and won competitions. They even put me and my brother into a video that they shot here. It had been two years since I did some snowboarding but when I started again, the young ones looked up at what I could do. It was a great feeling. I showed them how to do the same tricks. It makes me feel good when I am coaching them.



My doctor wants me to try a medication to help with how I am feeling. They tried drugs on me when I was younger but it just made me slow, it didn't make me feel better. I know seroquel helps me to sleep but because of my drinking it's not safe. Because of how I feel, I can't stop drinking. It just goes round and round. I sleep wherever I can find a place but it feels hopeless. Nothing seems to change.

## Quinn

I was 16 years old when I signed myself out of care. I was tired of living in someone else's home. I wanted to have a place of my own. I was lucky to get a geared to



**Backpack Facts**  
*Mental Health*

- 85.4% have high distress symptoms**
- 42% at least 1 suicide attempt**
- 33% major depressive disorder**
- 10% psychotic symptomology**

**The National Youth Homelessness Survey 2014**

Trauma fractures comprehension as a pebble shatters a windshield. The wound at the site of impact spreads across the field of vision, obscuring reality and challenging belief.

Jane Leavy

My cousin was also there and he got me involved in a gang. I was 12 and was useful to them in their activities. That's when I started picking up street skills. I learned how to deal. Doing good didn't last long. Another kid started giving me his pills. I saved them up and then I set up business. One of the other kids overdosed so I got moved again.

This time they brought me and my brother to a place in the country. It was just us and the foster family. They were pretty nice. I liked it. It was kind of like normal life. My worker found out and took us out because she hadn't approved it. It didn't matter to her whether we were happy there or not-just that she had to be in charge. She was a worker who hated me. That's a strong word but we hated each other. She didn't even bother trying to cover up how she felt about me.

Group homes were all about fighting. I was always on lock down or restraints. I did a lot of damage to some of those places. It was about fighting for yourself, for some sort of control over your life. I ran a lot too. Sometimes it was the specific place I was running from. Sometimes it was about running away from the whole system.




I was in a place in Ottawa but my girlfriend and I were getting split up so we ran away to be together. After three months on the streets, I got taken into custody again and came back to Kenora. If I could change one thing, I would probably choose to stay there now. It was the only place other than Kenora that felt good to me. I liked Ottawa.

Some of the AOH's (agency operated home) weren't too bad. I had a reputation for never bullshitting. The workers at the houses liked that so we got along. Maybe that wasn't so good because they did let me get away with stuff that I shouldn't have-like going to town when I was under house arrest. Once I even got a job which gave me spending money. I spent the extra money on weed and booze. I used both in the AOH and got away with it. Maybe if they had stopped me, I wouldn't have felt so invincible. Feeling that way got me into a lot of trouble.

There was another worker who was really good to me. Everybody told her how bad I was but she didn't buy into it. She saw me. When I had a problem, she worked with me to solve it. She trusted me and even arranged for me to live with some relatives of hers when I needed a place. I was a real human being to her, not just a case. That was the most important thing to me. I am a person. I need a life of my own and I need a place of my own to start living.

## Sheila



**Backpack Facts**  
***Child Protective Services History***  
**70.5% Indigenous Youth**  
**70.8% transgender & gender non-binary youth**  
**55.1% white youth**  
***The National Youth Homelessness Survey 2014***

In the year 2000 I was finally placed in care with my younger sister. We were removed from my mother's care because she was a heroin addict. I was moved from Nanaimo BC to Ashcroft BC-a place that I was not familiar with and had a population of 1800. While I was in care my caregiver would steal the money that my father would send me for my birthday and just for an allowance.

While I was in her care, I was raped. I was 16 years old. I had never even kissed a boy let alone have sex with anyone. This is how I lost my virginity. When I told her



## Backpack Facts

### ***Education***

**53.2% have dropped out**

**50% tested for learning disability**

**83% reported being bullied at school**

***The National Youth Homelessness Survey 2014***

on purpose and nearly died from overdoses a few more times. It was my landlord who saved me one time. She spent the night at the hospital with me. The only person that matters to me now is my brother and he has cancer. I think about dying a lot because living is worse.

I lived with my grandfather for four years. He took me everywhere and tried to teach me so much. He died when I was 17 and it has been downhill ever since. When he died I stayed by his grave for almost two days. People tried to get me leave but I didn't want to because he was everything to me. Grandfather always told me that I had to learn to survive and be strong.

I have gone crazy-voices in my head. My friends would ask me who I was talking to and I would just say no one and laugh. They never knew what I was hearing or what I would see in front of me. It gets so bad that sometimes I don't know whether I am awake or dreaming. The only way to make the dreaming stop is to drink until I pass out. That hasn't worked out too well for me.



Sometimes I get so angry that I attack anyone who is near me. My wife tries to calm me down. I've been out of jail for almost three months now which is the longest I have been out in years.

The funny thing about jail is that I've had a good time in there. It was warm and I got fed good. I learned how to play cribbage and poker. There was always someone to talk to and I didn't get into trouble.

them use everything they have abusing and then they don't have any thing to back them up when the moneys gone. That's why they get sick. Some people can do substances and still have a life. They encourage others to do it with them but others can't handle it. Those people who started them just walk away and don't care about the damage they have done. There's a lot of damage out on the streets.

Even if you are on the streets you still want the same things that other people want-a home of your own, nice clothes, a bit of travelling. We have dreams and that should matter. I would like to get my high school finished and go onto college. Its too bad that I didn't get it done before but I had a problem with drugs and alcohol back then. I'm ready to try again.

When you're on the streets, it's hard. Even getting medical stuff done is hard. Getting a health card is complicated when you don't have an address. They need id before you can get id. Once you get your card, you hope to get a doctor but

*Memories have huge staying power, but like dreams, they thrive in the dark, surviving for decades in the deep waters of our minds like shipwrecks on the sea bed.*

*J.G. Ballard*

there's not enough. Once you get a doctor, you can't get to appointments.

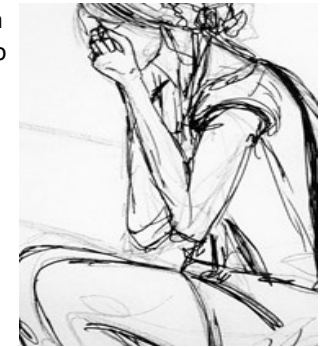
Legal stuff is always hard but worse when you're homeless. I had a court order to reside at the emergency shelter. They put my curfew at 6 p.m. but the shelter doesn't open until 8 p.m.. Of course the cops then tried to breach me. For a couple of days, I stood in front of the shelter from 6 until it opened. I finally went back to court and they realized how stupid the order was. I wish the cops would pay as much attention to me when I reported things stolen. They just always seem to believe the other person because they don't listen to me.

If there is one thing that would make a difference, it would be to have people listen to me and I mean really listen to me like I matter to them.

## Chaos

I am 21 years old and I don't expect to see 23. I have tried to kill myself five times

about this, she immediately told me to have a bathe and after that was done, I went to the doctor to have a rape examination. I charged the person that did this to me but the crown did not have enough evidence to pursue and he was let go to torment me. I was told by my caregiver that I was lying and eventually I was removed from her care and put back into my mother's care. I was then put on youth agreements and when I was 18, I was thrown out into the world with no life experience.



I am 34 years old now and I have struggled ever since. I have been raped again twice. I have been beaten by my boyfriends. I cannot hold a job. I suffer from many mental illnesses including chronic depression, anxiety, panic disorder, PTSD, bipolar and many more. I am addicted to opiates but before the opiates, I was a chronic alcoholic. I am homeless right now. My kids are in care. Their worker would not listen to me on how much I loved my children and wanted to protect them. I have lost everything. Everything means my children.

## Matt

*Someone who has experienced trauma also has gifts to offer all of us—in their depth, their knowledge of our universal vulnerability and their experience of the power of compassion*

*Sharon Salzberg*



### Backpack Facts


#### *Substance Abuse*

***25% have a substance related disorder based on diagnostic criteria at age 21***

***Over half reported substance abuse & addiction as a coping mechanism***

***35.2% hospitalized for drug overdose***

***The National Youth Homelessness Survey 2014***



**Backpack Facts**

*Health*

**Mortality rate is 11 times higher than housed peers**

**74% have one or more chronic health conditions**

**58% report significant head injuries**

**59% females pregnant (32% miscarry)**

**The National Youth Homelessness Survey 2014**

I went into foster care when I was 4 years old. I came out when I was 18. I only had 3 placements and stayed with one family for 11 years. That was good. My workers were mostly okay. I even finished high school. I pushed myself to finish school because I have a good work ethic.

I have had some trouble with the law. Drugs cost money. I'd like to be clean someday but the time is not right now. I would be alone if I quit drugs. All my friends and all my family are into the life style. It's the way it is.

I hold a job. When I've had to do time, they always hire me back because I am a good worker. Right now I sleep wherever someone has room for me. I never know where that will be and for how long. At least I've got my job and a paycheck. I want a roof over my head where I can relax because it's my place. I've never had that.

I would like to do something with my art. I like doing it and want to do more.

The one thing that I would tell workers is to listen more. Sometimes it felt like they were just going through a list. You can tell the difference between someone going through the motions and someone who is really listening to what you are trying to say.

**Jasmine**

On the streets people can be

*Leslie Jamieson*

*No trauma has discrete edges. Trauma bleeds out of wounds and across boundaries.*

really be manipulative. You

meet someone and they tell you that they will help you get a place. They end up squirting you for your cash and leave you with nothing. Lots of people have done that to me. I trusted them but I am learning not to trust any one who says they want to help me. You have to be careful and choose the ones who actually will help instead of just talking. I've got some positive help right now.

I had a place. I wanted it to be my home but it didn't work that way. When you have a place, every one starts hanging out. Pretty soon the word gets out and then your place isn't yours anymore. Things get out of control fast. It becomes a party place and then you're evicted.

If I could stay with family, I would but they have their own lives. I would like it if they would pick me up sometimes and bring me to their homes just to visit for the day but it is easier to drive by. This makes me a bit sad.

I have found some good places-there's some drop ins around. It's safer when there's someone supervising. You have to make sure that you don't leave with the wrong person. I've started with some peer support that's helpful. There's also some programs I am trying. I'm finding out that there is quite a bit of help now that I am sober. I keep trying.

I have been bullied a lot. I guess that I'm a target because of who I am. There's a storm of stuff others find to pick on me about. Sometimes it's how I dress. It's my choice and it doesn't hurt them but they shout out hurtful things at me. There's no reason for that, just meanness.

*Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind do not matter and those who matter do not mind.*

*Dr. Seuss*

Others hurt me by getting me to do stuff with them that's not good for me. They mislead you so that you fill their need. When you quit abusing substances, those who are still doing it get mad at you. I try to laugh at them but it's sad. I watch

