



Bridging the gap

Measuredoutcome provides a collaborative, web-based service to grant makers, non-profits and program participants, focused on gathering feedback and information on programs delivered in the charitable sector.



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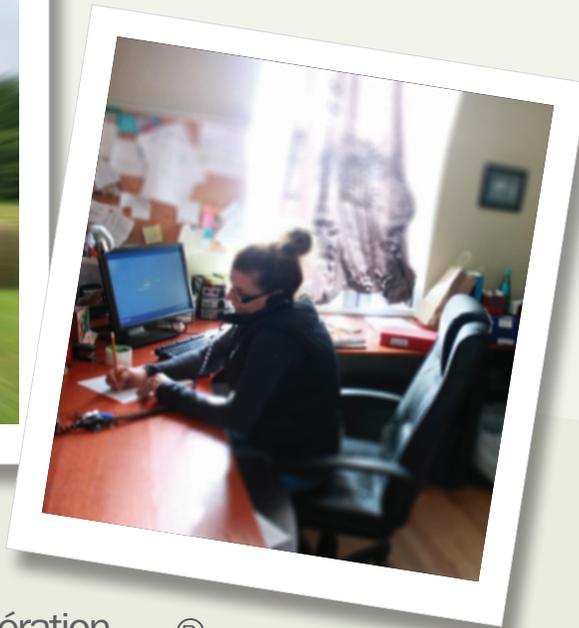
MEASURING RETURN

The Operation Come Home Reunite Program



Measuredoutcome

Bridging the information gap in the non-profit sector



➔ MEASURING RETURN: THE OPERATION COME HOME REUNITE PROGRAM

On any given night, approximately 33,000 Canadians are homeless. Of these, 8,500 to 11,000 are youth.¹ Most homeless youth do not have the option of living in a viable home. Abuse, addictions and circumstance have left them with few alternatives other than living rough, using emergency shelters, squatting or couch surfing. The more time young people spend in these situations, the more likely it is they will experience deteriorating physical and mental health, as well as become chronically homeless, dependent on emergency services, and involved in the criminal justice system. The prospects are grim.

Whether seen from a human rights, community safety or economic perspective, it is important that homeless youth are given the tools to be able to make positive lifestyle choices, secure stable housing, gain regular employment and, where viable, return to their families.

Many services exist to help homeless youth stabilize their circumstances. These include emergency housing, educational programs, job readiness training and addictions counseling, to name a few. It is generally agreed that no, single approach is effective for all youth. To successfully transition a young person from homelessness requires many points of contact over time. Ideally, these supports are provided and have an impact within the first six months of homelessness.

In a minority of cases, the solution to homelessness may be to go home. For these young people, if their home is not perfect, it is still better than the immediate alternative.

When a young person with a caring family from Kelowna, BC finds herself in a Winnipeg shelter, there may be a narrow window of opportunity for a skilled youth worker to facilitate her return home. Assisting this young woman, and others like her, to return home is part of the mission of Ottawa-based *Operation Come Home*. In 2010, the *Operation Come Home Reunite Program* made it possible for 72 young people across the country to go home.

¹ As compiled by CBC's The Fifth Estate for its segment, "No Way Home".

2010 REUNITES

DEPARTURE

ABBOTSFORD, BC
 TORONTO, ON
 LONDON, ON
 SAULT STE MARIE, ON
 CARLETON PLACE, ON
 CALGARY, AB
 RED DEER, AB
 CALGARY, AB
 OTTAWA, ON
 TORONTO, ON
 PENTICTON, BC
 PENTICTON, BC
 OAKVILLE, ON
 MONTREAL, QC
 KAMLOOPS, BC
 EDMONTON, AB
 EDMONTON, AB
 CALGARY, AB
 CALGARY, AB
 PENTICTON, BC
 KELOWNA, BC
 OTTAWA, ON
 EDMONTON, AB
 KINGSTON, ON
 SYDNEY, NS
 KELOWNA, BC
 EDMONTON, AB
 DARTMOUTH, NS
 SUDBURY, ON
 BRACEBRIDGE, ON
 HALIFAX, NS
 THUNDER BAY, ON
 THUNDER BAY, ON
 ORILLIA, ON
 SOUTH RIVER, ON
 MONCTON, ON
 BARRIE, ON

DESTINATION

CALGARY, AB
 TRURO, NS
 PENTICTON, BC
 LONDON, ON
 HALIFAX, NS
 OWEN SOUND, ON
 CHAPLIN, SK
 ST. JOHN'S, NB
 EDMONTON, AB
 NEW LISKEARD, ON
 HOBBEWA, AB
 HOBBEWA, AB
 WINDSOR, ON
 ST. PAUL, AB
 EDMONTON, AB
 BELLEVILLE, ON
 BELLEVILLE, ON
 KELOWNA, BC
 KELOWNA, BC
 KAMLOOPS, BC
 GRAND FORKS, BC
 VANCOUVER, BC
 SASKATOON, SK
 OTTAWA, ON
 HALIFAX, NS
 BRANDON, MB
 DALHOUSIE, NB
 SAINT JOHN, NB
 THUNDER BAY, ON
 MATTON, ON
 LONDON, ON
 SASKATOON, SK
 SASKATOON, SK
 DRYDEN, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
 MONTREAL, QC
 TEMISCAMING, QC

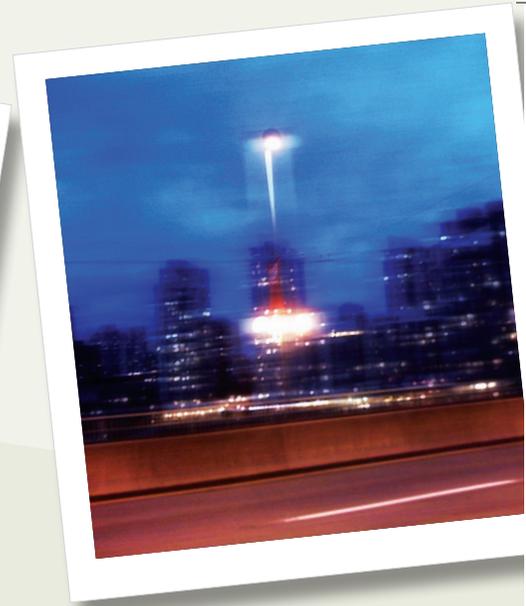
DEPARTURE

OTTAWA, ON
 KELOWNA, BC
 HALIFAX, NS
 CHAPLEAU, ON
 EDMONTON, AB
 KELOWNA, BC
 KELOWNA, BC
 MONTREAL, QC
 VANCOUVER, BC
 SPRINGHILL, NS
 SUDBURY, ON
 BARRIE, ON
 HALIFAX, NS
 KELOWNA, BC
 SUDBURY, ON
 PENTICTON, BC
 MONTREAL, QC
 ST. JOHN, NB
 EDMONTON, AB
 CALGARY, AB
 MONTREAL, QC
 WINNIPEG, MB
 TORONTO, ON
 COURTENAY, BC
 EDMONTON, AB
 EDMONTON, AB
 MISSISSAUGA, ON
 WINDSOR, ON
 MONTREAL, QC
 OTTAWA, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
 MIDLAND, ON
 BLACKCREEK, BC
 EDMONTON, AB
 WINDSOR, ON
 HALIFAX, NS

DESTINATION

CALGARY, AB
 CHELMSFORD, ON
 KITCHENER, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
 ABBOTSFORD, BC
 CALGARY, AB
 CALGARY, AB
 BAIE-COMEAU, QC
 HAMILTON, ON
 CHILLIWACK, BC
 THUNDER BAY, ON
 NEWMARKET, ON
 HAMILTON, ON
 WINNIPEG, MB
 THUNDER BAY, ON
 RIVIERE DU LARP, QC
 CALGARY, AB
 OSHAWA, ON
 RED DEER, AB
 KELOWNA, BC
 OTTAWA, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
 LLOYDMINISTER, SK
 EDMONTON, AB
 DARTMOUTH, NS
 HALIFAX, NS
 SUDBURY, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
 SASKATOON, SK
 DIGBY, NS
 BROCKVILLE, ON
 OTTAWA, ON
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The Operation Come Home Reunite Program created positive outcomes for 72 youth in 2010, bringing families back together and reducing strain on homeless youth services across Canada.



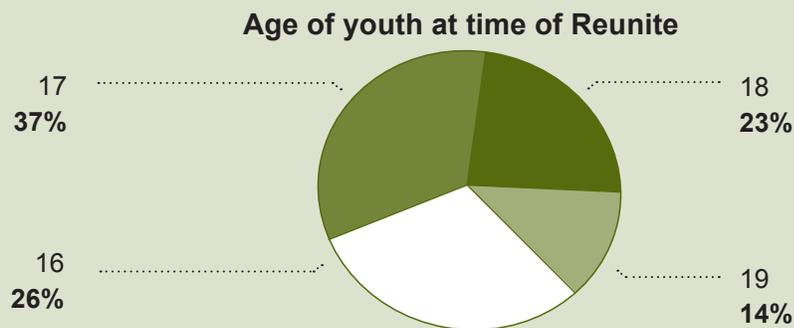
But does it work? Do these young people stay united with their families?

Operation Come Home, in conjunction with Measuredoutcome.org™, conducted interviews with 38 of the 72 youth and their families who were reunited over the past 18 months.² The results, outlined in this report, indicate that over 50% of these youth remained home or in stable situations from six months to a year following their reunite. Out of all of the reunites surveyed, 88% of the youth have remained in contact with their families since going home.

The return on investment from the Reunite Program is significant. As shown below, this preventative approach equates to noteworthy savings in emergency services, healthcare and policing.

→ WHO ARE THE REUNITES?

In 2010, youth involved in the Reunite Program came from, and travelled to, almost every part of Canada. Not surprisingly, most youth returned to smaller communities from larger urban centres. Many were as far away from home as they could get within Canada.



A majority of the youth (86%) who were reunited with their families in 2010 were under the age of 19. Youth reunited through the program were divided almost evenly between males and females.

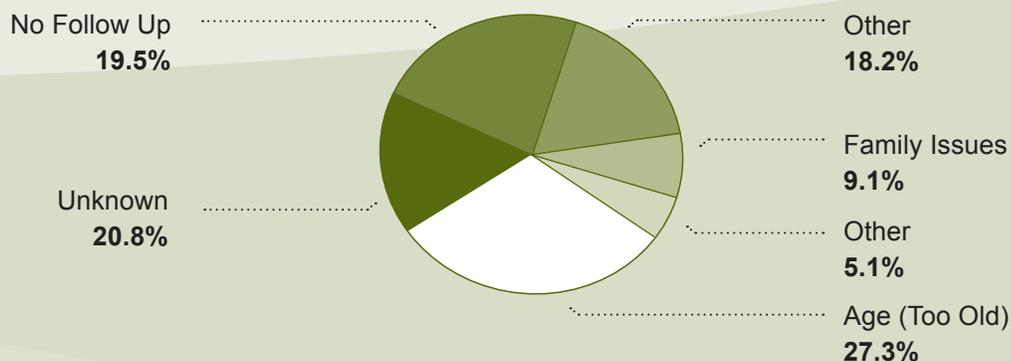
² Contact with all program participants was attempted five times, by phone. Of the 51 families that OCH established contact with, 13 declined to participate in the survey.



→ WHO WAS NOT REUNITED

The Reunite Program had 157 requests for support in 2010. 86 of the requests were fulfilled, and 77 of them were incomplete or declined for the following reasons:

Reunite Requests Incomplete or Declined



These young people may not have been ready to return home, their families may not have been willing to accept them back, or the youth worker may have felt that a reunite was not appropriate for any number of reasons. Several of these young people were referred to other services or, at the very least, received some telephone counseling.

I am lucky for the program. Without the program, I would not be with my daughter today. ~ Mother

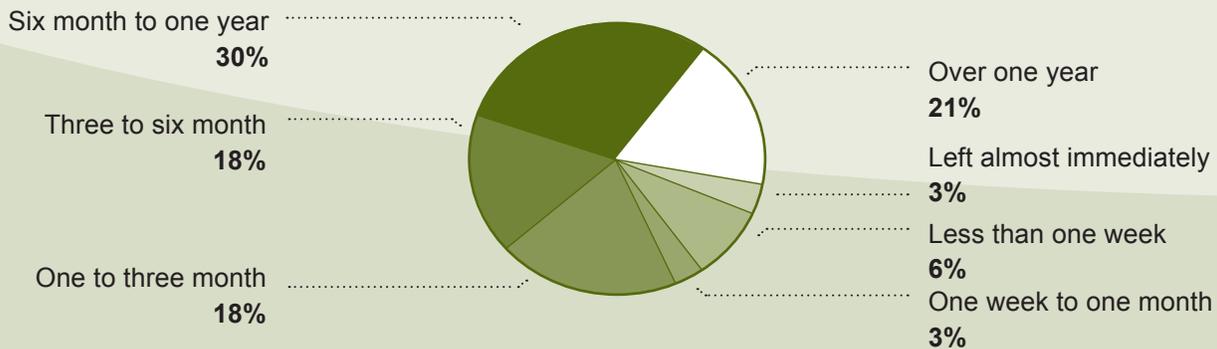
Of critical interest were the 21 young people (27%) who were declined because they were too old to participate in the program (over 19). Expanding the program to include young people up to the ages of 21-24 would be worth consideration.

I would never have been able to get home if it were not for OCH. ~ Reunite Youth



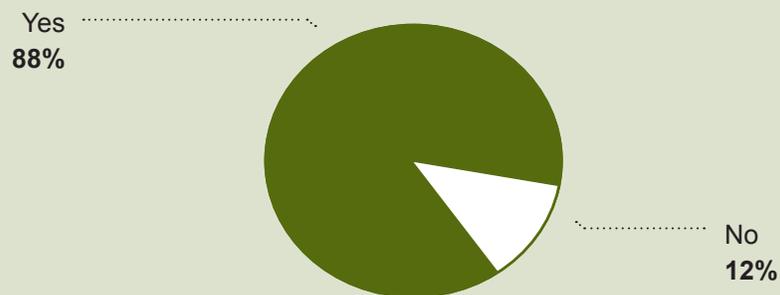
→ SURVEY RESULTS

How long did your child stay at home after the Reunite?



Of the reunites contacted, 51% of the youth remained at home six months to over a year after the reunite. 12% stayed at home for less than one month.³ Many of the successful reunites go back to school or get jobs and move into their own apartments. In a couple of cases, social services or other family members stepped in for the youth, and helped them continue their journey.

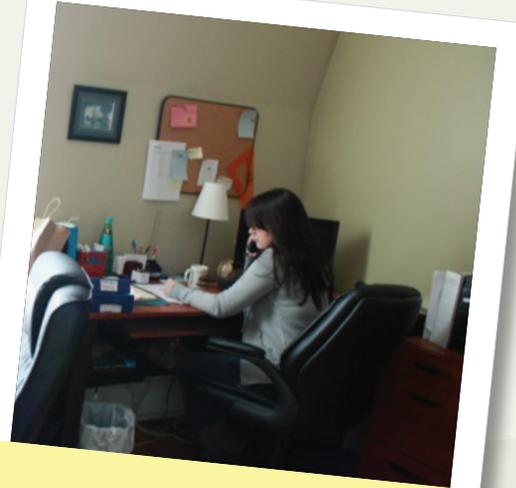
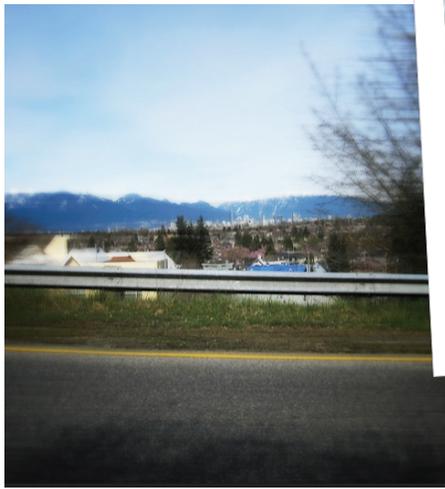
Has your child stayed in contact since they left again?



88% of the youth who took part in the Reunite Program are still in regular contact with their families, even if they have not continued to live with them.

³ This does not necessarily indicate an early departure from home. All reunites surveyed have taken place within the last 18 months. Many of the survey participants were contacted in the 3-6 month period after their reunite. Subsequent surveys will provide a more developed statistic for this element.





How did your child find out about the Reunite Program?

Not surprisingly, most reunites were initiated through word of mouth and referral.

71% of youth who used the Reunite Program found out about it through channels such as the following:

- Friends in Thunder Bay knew about the program.
- My sister was sent home by OCH and I found out from her.
- My dad was reunited by Operation Come Home 15 years ago.
- Cyrus Centre in Vancouver.
- Ministry of Community Services.
- Shelter workers told me about the program.

“
 The family situation has improved 140%. It is a wonderful program getting back my daughter. ~ Parent
 ”

→ ASHLEY'S STORY

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to thank Operation Come Home for reuniting me back to my family in Nova Scotia. I made a bad decision going to Calgary, one I actually don't want to remember. I also want to thank Natalie, she helped me so much, I was scared and frustrated and at first I was taking it out on her. Then I realized she was just trying to help me the best that she could. We talked on the phone everyday until my bus ticket came, she always made sure I was safe and even talked me through the long bus ride ahead of me. Natalie made sure I had food along the way and even had a backpack full of stuff when I stopped in Ottawa.

When Natalie called me the other day, I was so excited to hear from her. I am doing really well, starting school in February and have a part-time job at Mark's Warehouse. I am in a good place right now and I can't thank Operation Come Home and Natalie enough for what she has done for me...

Ashley B



→ THE REUNITE PROCESS

Every reunite is different, however the process for most is as follows:

Referral – A young person is referred to the program by a partner agency and/or self-refers as a result of seeing a Reunite flier or poster.

Intake – A youth worker undertakes an intake assessment. Of the approximate 144 calls per year, about half of the youth are referred to other services, or eventually decline to participate in the program.

Contact – The youth worker makes initial contact with the family and, if appropriate, sets up a conversation with the youth.

Connection – Operation Come Home facilitates an initial phone conversation between the young person and their family.

The Reunite – Following the phone conversation, if the young person and their family feels that a reunite is appropriate, OCH will arrange transportation through program travel sponsor, Greyhound Canada.

Follow-up – Once home, OCH will contact the youth and their family to ensure that the Reunite was successful and provide limited additional counseling and referrals.



She moved back with her mother. She has a full-time job as a counselor and she goes to church regularly. The program and being reunited has changed her life completely. She is a different person now.

~ Guardian



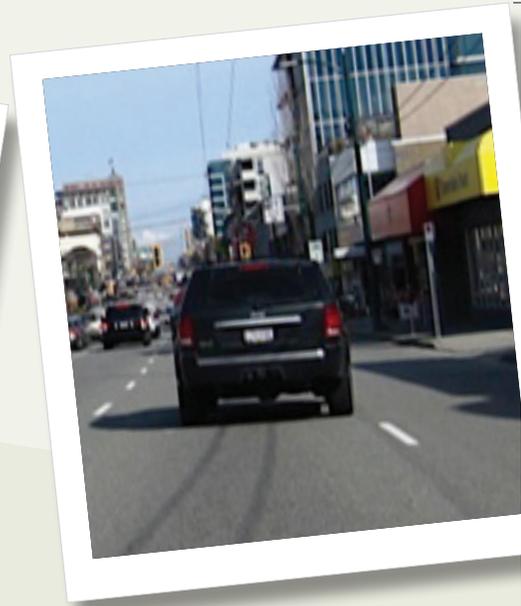


→ SHOUT OUT TO GREYHOUND CANADA

The Reunite Program would not be possible without the community service and in-kind support of Greyhound Canada. In 2010, Greyhound drivers logged over 140,330 km (3½ trips around the Earth) bringing Reunite youth home. Thank you Greyhound Canada.



Still at home and doing seasonal work. His father is very proud of him. He is deeply involved in the boy scouts. He is actually mentoring small children. ~ Parent



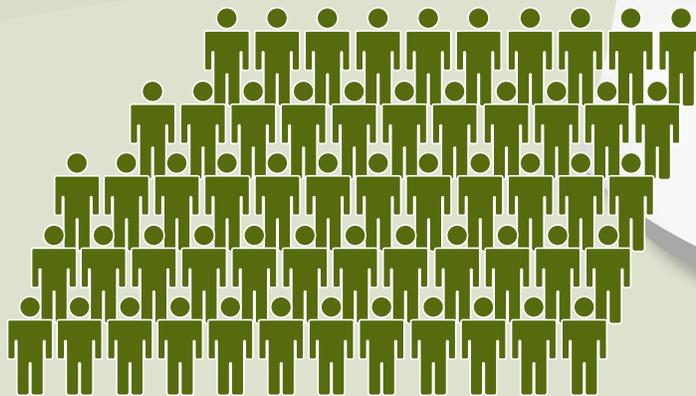
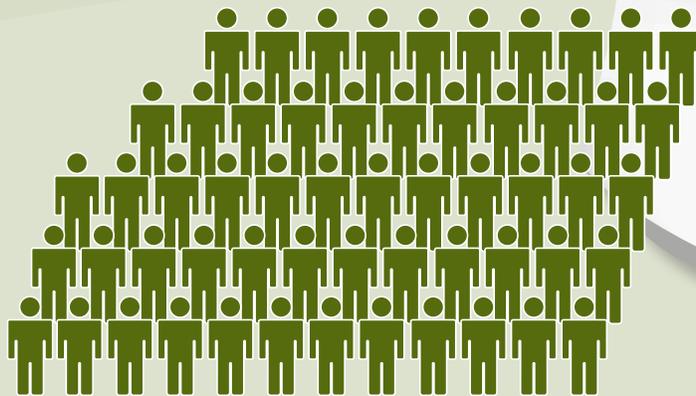
➔ REUNITE PROGRAM RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Calculating the cost of homelessness in Canada is not an easy task. In addition to emergency shelter and food, homeless people are more likely to draw on resources from social services, as well as the medical and criminal justice system. Homeless people generally require additional counseling for mental health and addictions issues, they make greater and more frequent use of hospital emergency care, and they are much more likely to be involved with police and the courts. The most recent estimates of the cumulative costs of these services ranges between \$30,000 - \$55,000 per person per year.¹

In 2010, investment in the Operation Come Home Reunite Program (not including in-kind contributions by Greyhound Canada) was approximately \$53,000 – averaging about \$750 per reunion. Assuming that 75% of the 72 reunites were successful for at least one year, this would represent an annual savings of between \$1.6 and \$3m.²



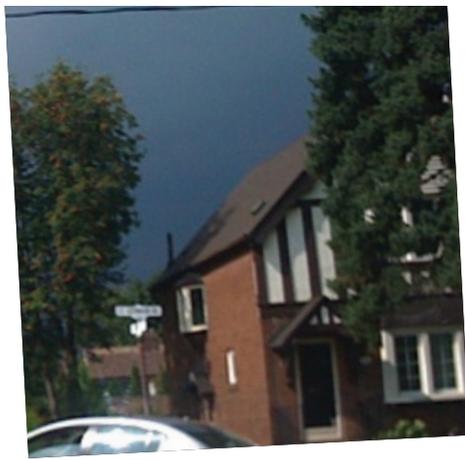
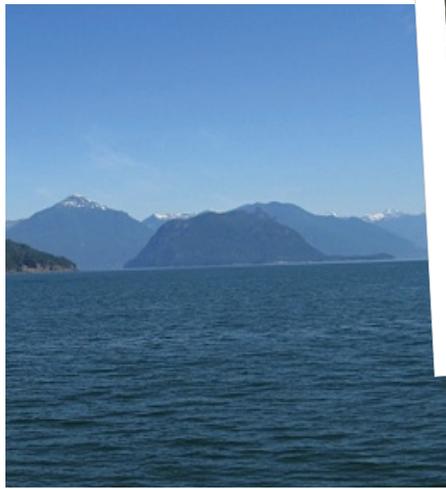
The *one time* investment for each successful reunite is **\$750.**

To support one homeless youth costs, an average of **\$42,500 per year,** the equivalent of **56 reunites.**

¹ Cities and Environment Unit, "The Cost of Homelessness and the Value of Investment in Housing Support Services in Halifax Regional Municipality," Dalhousie University (June, 2006.) Somers, Julian est. al, "Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia" Simon Fraser University Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction. (April, 2008)

² This calculation does not take into consideration savings over multiple years or other benefits of the program such as support for non-reunited youth. It also does not include the cost of any long-term physical or mental health issues and/or involvement in the justice system. It may be valuable to consider these factors in future research.



➔ OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Program Expansion – Currently, Reunite is limited to youth aged 16-19. Services need to be expanded to better assist older homeless youth, those with companion animals, and aboriginal youth who may have unique needs. (Those under the age of 16 should be assisted by provincial child welfare services.)

Travel Support - At the best of times, a journey across Canada by bus can be a challenging experience. Several interviewees identified difficulties transferring buses. Operation Come Home currently has limited ability to meet youth as they travel. A friendly face and the prospect of a good meal and someone to talk to along the journey would be beneficial. This would require increased volunteer coordination.

The children were not supervised when they were traveling home. My granddaughter had to change buses 3 times. There should be help for them along the way when they make their trip home. ~ Grandmother

Continuing Support and Follow-up – Once home, the issues that led a young person to leave likely still exist. Operation Come Home has limited resources to provide support and referrals to families. In addition to the one-month call, feedback suggests that working with families in the first weeks after a reunite and checking in with the family in the first six months would increase long-term reunite success. It would also help Operation Come Home assess and improve the program. Multiple Reunite families have indicated that a more effective follow-up and referral system would be very valuable.

More follow up from Reunite staff to see how we are doing and speaking with the youth so that they don't run away again. We need more assistance with referrals in our community and we would like you to do that. ~ Parent

Essential Service – Despite the cost-effectiveness of this program, core funding for help-line, network development and marketing does not exist. A stable source of funding for Reunite would ensure continued and expanded success of the program.