Housing First 4 Youth

The emerging impact of Housing First for Youth in Canada and Europe

Stephen Gaetz **Professor, Faculty of Education, York University**
President & CEO, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Melanie Redman **President & CEO, A Way Home Canada**

PORTAVITA
HOUSING FIRST
Nejdřív je potřeba bydlet...

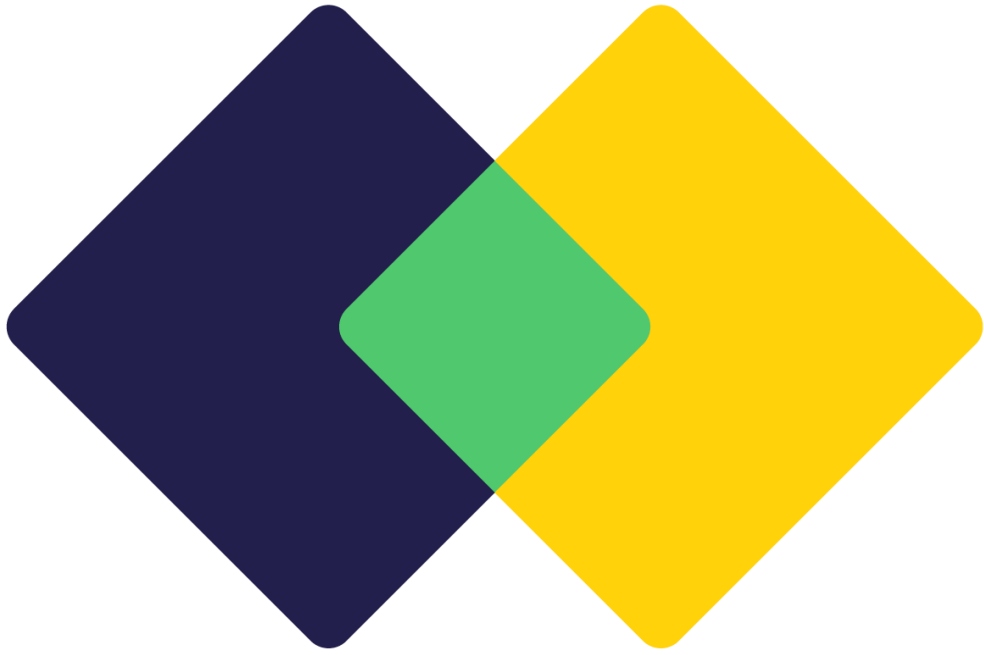# 1 Who we are ...

ABOUT US:

A Way Home
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI
CANADA

A Way Home is a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, practice and planning. We also lead the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness.
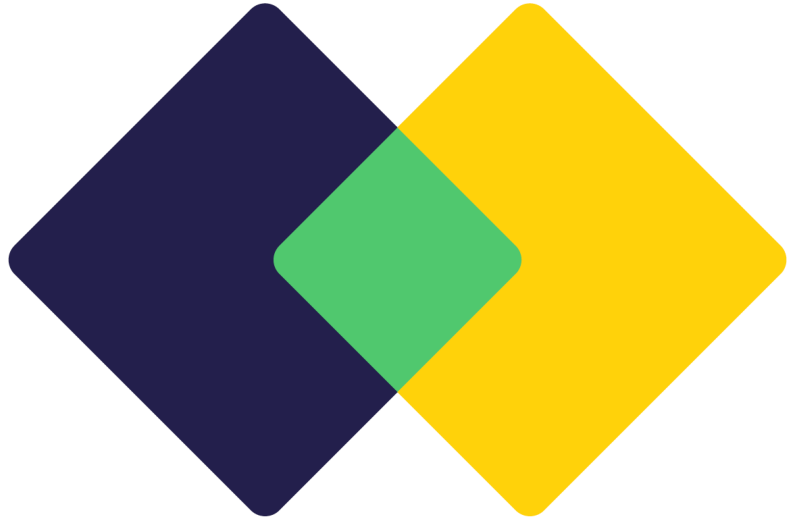
ABOUT US:

canadian observatory on homelessness

The ***Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*** (COH) is a research and policy partnership working to conduct and mobilize research designed to have an impact on solutions to homelessness.
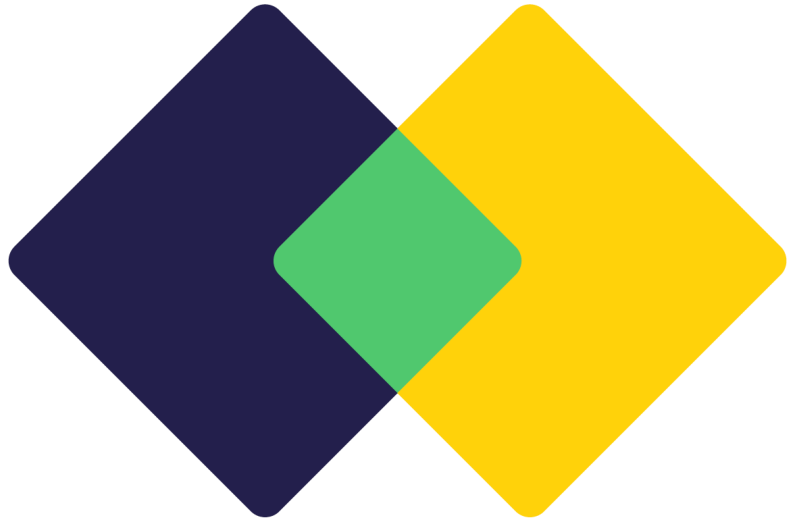
Making the Shift has funded
39 research projects across Canada
focusing on the prevention of youth
homelessness

MAKING
THE SHIFT

Funded Research

Making the Shift
Demonstration Projects

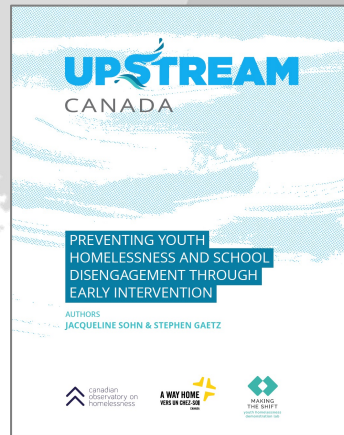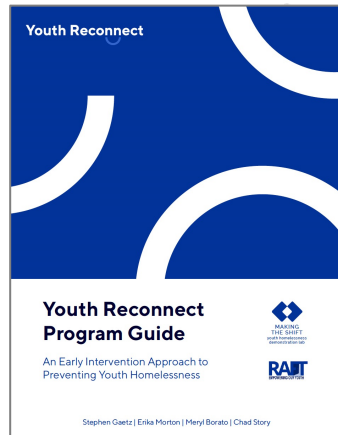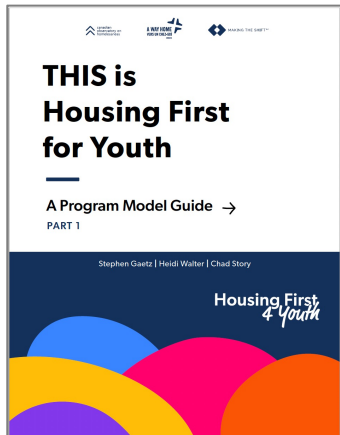Employing design thinking, our ***demonstration projects*** are intended to expand our knowledge and understanding of innovative approaches to preventing and ending youth homelessness by identifying, developing, prototyping, testing, evaluating, and mobilizing innovations in policy and practice.

Demonstration Project Models: Upstream, Youth Reconnect, Family and Natural Supports (FNS), Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)

MAKE **RESEARCH** MATTER

THIS is Housing First for Youth

A Program Model Guide →
PART 1

Stephen Gaetz | Heidi Walter | Chad Story

Housing First 4 Youth

Youth Reconnect

Youth Reconnect Program Guide

An Early Intervention Approach to Preventing Youth Homelessness

Stephen Gaetz | Erika Morton | Meryl Borato | Chad Story

UPSTREAM CANADA

PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND SCHOOL DISENGAGEMENT THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION

AUTHORS
JACQUELINE SOHN & STEPHEN GAETZ

Family and Natural Supports:
A Framework to Enhance Young People's Network of Support

Authors:
Meryl Borato, Stephen Goetz, & Lesley McMillan
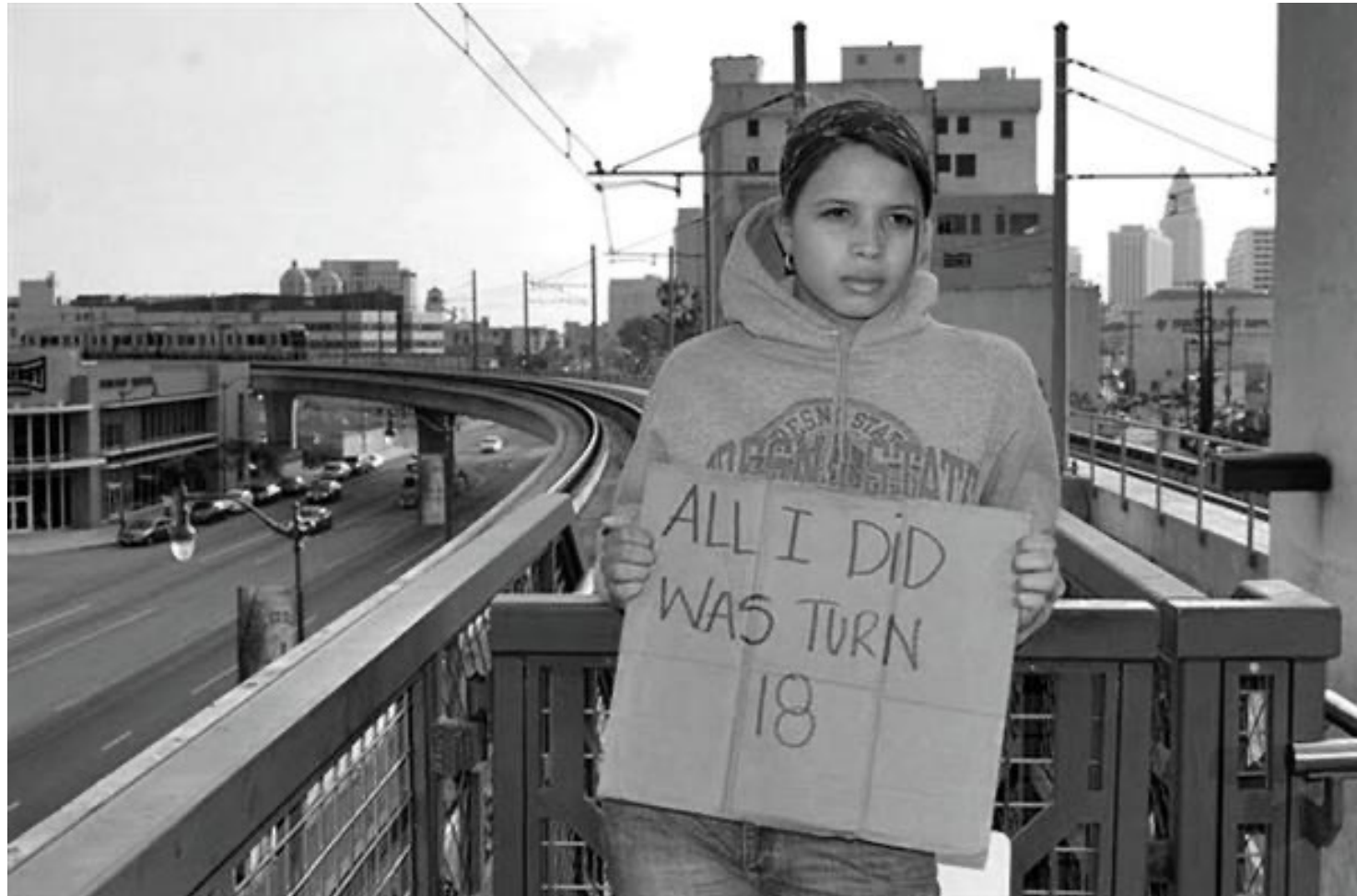
FAMILY & NATURAL SUPPORTS

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15 SITES in

12 COMMUNITIES

2

What IS Housing First for Youth?

Does Housing First work for young people?

Background

Questions on the replicability of the Housing First program for young people (16-24)

Goering et al. (2011), Aubry et al. (2015)

The need to tailor the HF model to meet the specific needs of youth population

Kozloff et al. (2016)

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"We suggest considering modifications of "Housing First" to maintain fidelity to core principles while better meeting the needs of youth".

Kozloff et al., (2016) **At Home / Chez Soi**

Developing Housing First for Youth

Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary (2010)

canadian observatory on homelessness

STREET YOUTH PLANNING COLLABORATIVE

A WAY HOME VERS UN CHEZ-SOI
CANADA

National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness

A SAFE & DECENT PLACE TO LIVE
Towards A Housing First Framework for Youth

Stephen Gaetz

homeless hub
REPORT SERIES
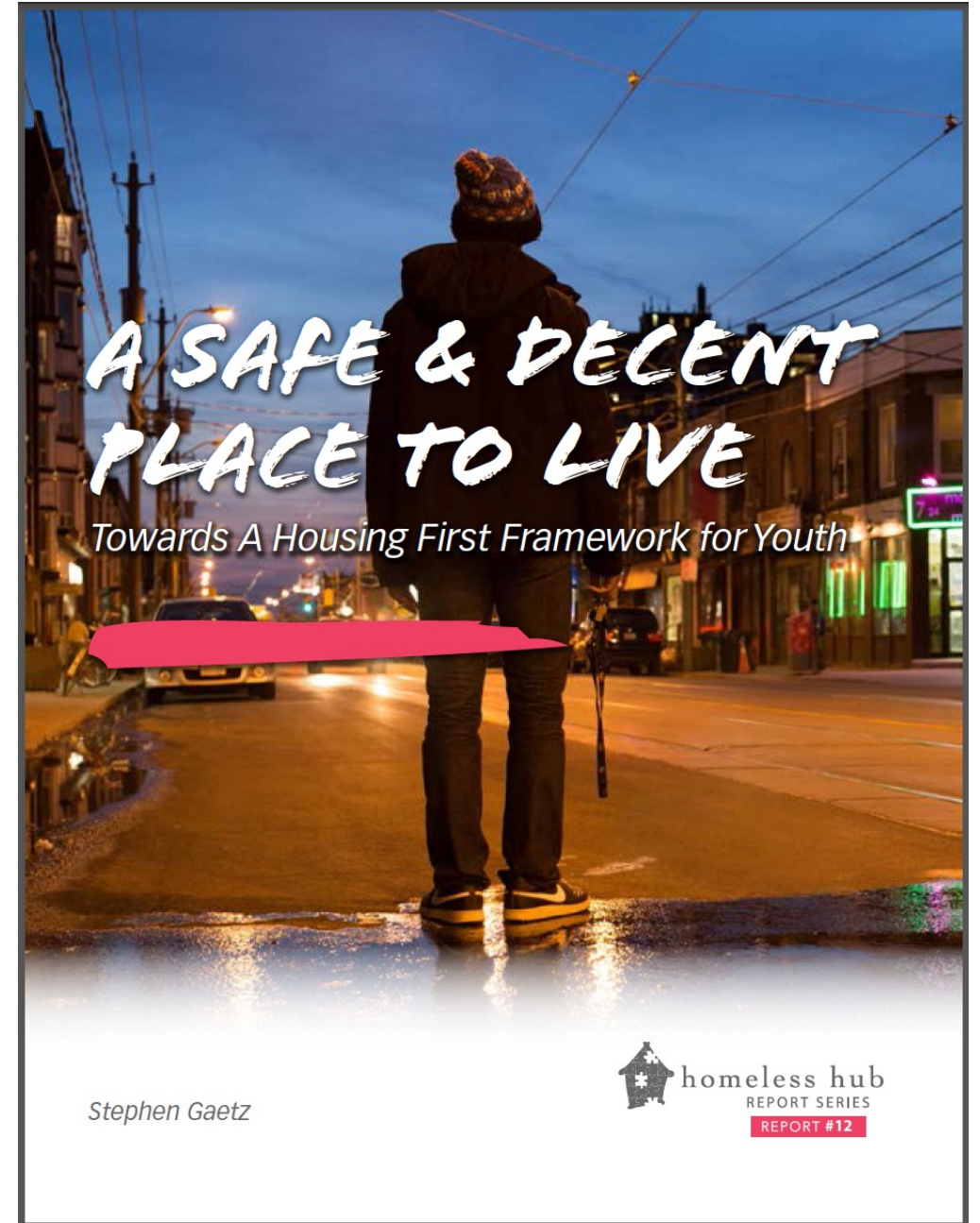REPORT #12
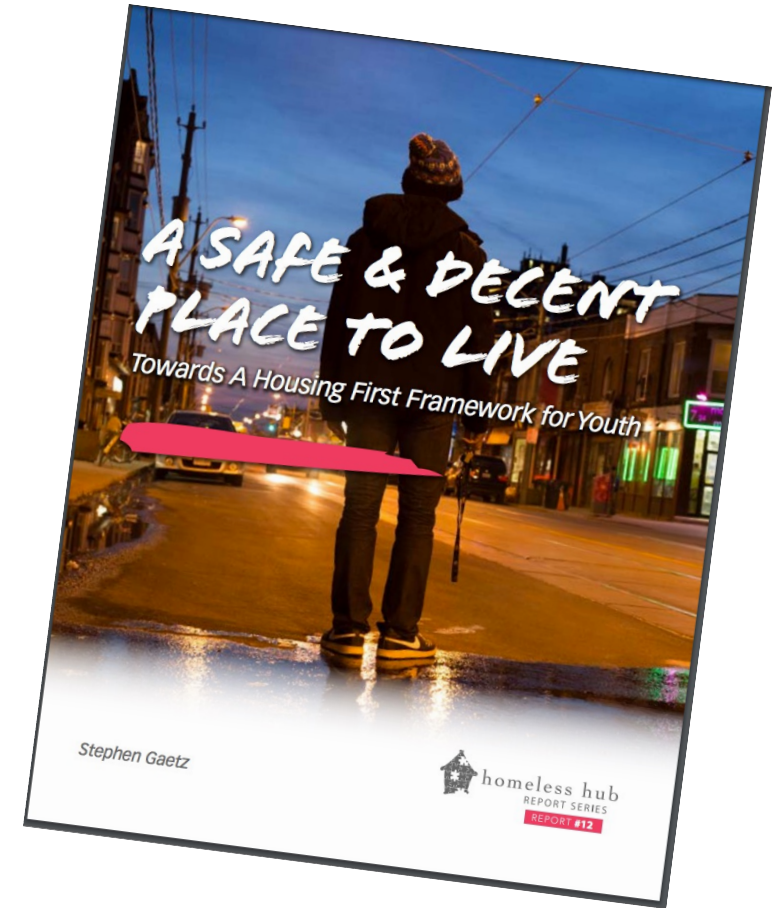
The importance of developing a response based on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults.

Housing First for Youth launched in 2014

A SAFE & DECENT PLACE TO LIVE

Towards A Housing First Framework for Youth

Stephen Gaetz

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REPORT SERIES
REPORT #12

What is Housing First for Youth?

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rights-based intervention for young people (aged 16-24) who experience homelessness, or who are at risk. It is designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults by providing them with immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable and appropriate, and the necessary and age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment, and social inclusion.

The Core Principles of HF4Y

- **1. A Right to Housing with No Preconditions**

↓

- **2. Youth Choice, Youth Voice, and Self-determination**

↓

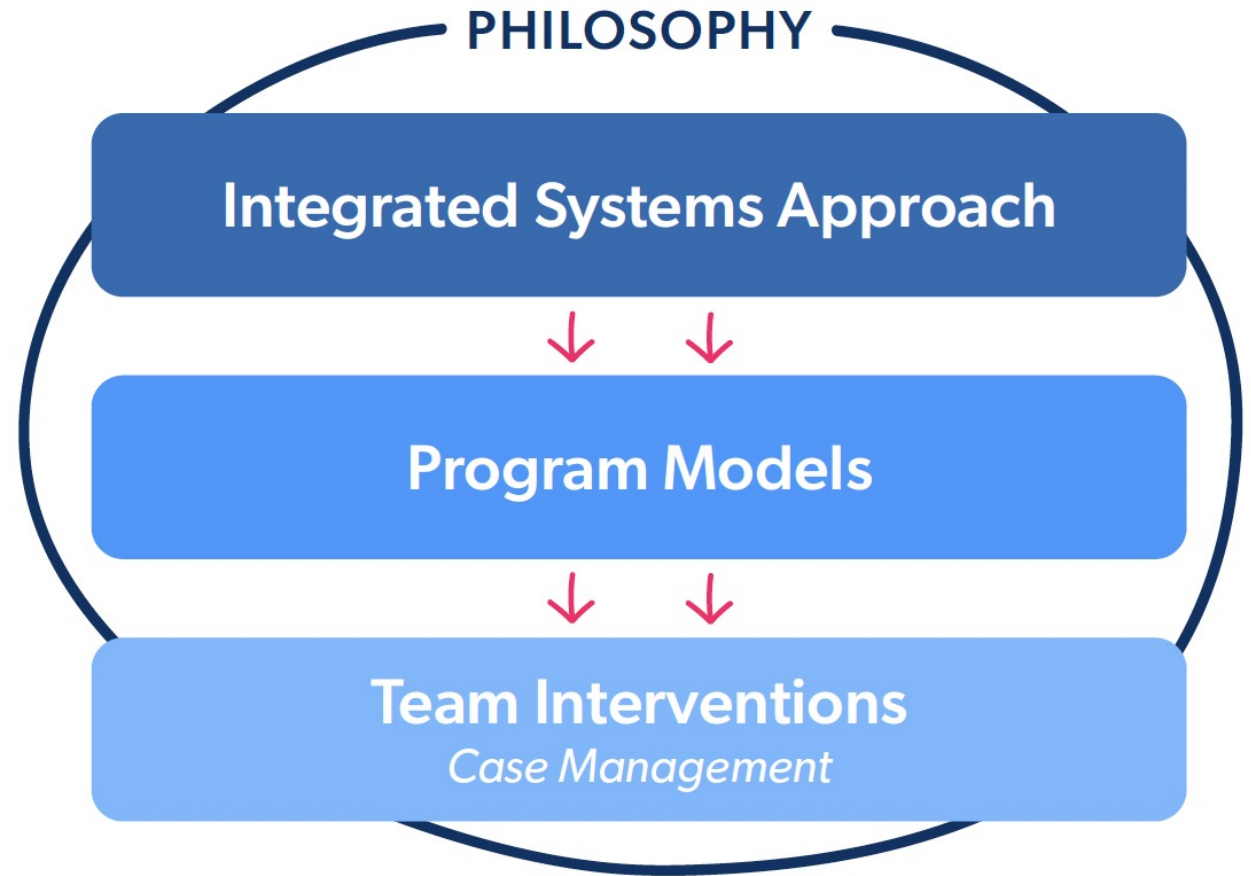- **3. Positive Youth Development and Wellness orientation**

↓

- **4. Individualized, Client-driven Supports with no Time Limits**

↓

- **5. Social Inclusion and Community Integration**
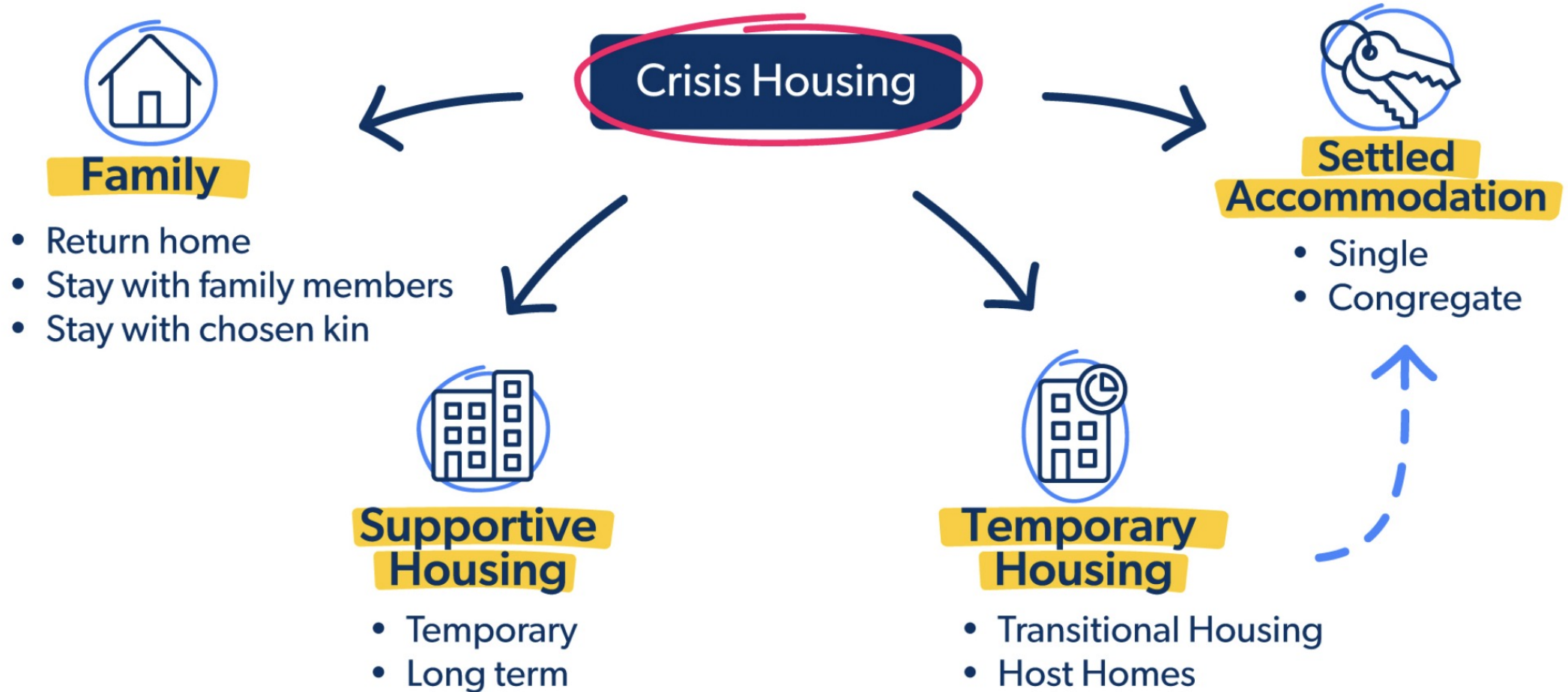
HF4Y

A Philosophy and a Program Model

PHILOSOPHY

Integrated Systems Approach

↓ ↓

Program Models

↓ ↓

Team Interventions
Case Management

HF
4Y

Models of Accommodation

HF
4Y

Models of Accommodation

Homeless Youth
or "at risk youth"

Crisis Housing

Family
- Return home
- Stay with family members
- Stay with chosen kin

Supportive Housing
- Temporary
- Long term

Temporary Housing
- Transitional Housing
- Host Homes

Settled Accommodation
- Single
- Congregate

HF4Y

The Range of Supports

HF
4Y

The Range of Supports

1. Housing Supports

2. Health & Well-being

3. Access to Income & Education

4. Complementary Supports

5. Social Inclusion

HF
4Y

1. Housing supports

- *Help in obtaining housing*

- *Housing retention*

- *Rent supplements*

- *Support when things go wrong*

- *Aftercare*

HF
4Y

2. Supports for health and well-being

- *Trauma informed care*

- *Mental Health*

- *Substance use and addictions*

- *Harm Reduction*

- *Healthy Sexuality*

- *Personal Safety*

HF
4Y

3. Access to income and education

- *Income supports*

- *Training*

- *Employment*

- *Education*

HF
4Y

4. Complementary supports

- Life skills

- Adult support and mentoring

- Supporting young people with children

- System Navigation and Advocacy

- Peer support

- Legal supports

5. Enhancing Social Inclusion

- *Developing social relations*

- *Enhancing Family Relations and Natural Supports*

- *Community engagement*

- *Cultural engagement*

- *Meaningful activities*

Research and Evaluation

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Research:

- Qualitative and quantitative methods
- Outcomes tied to service and supports
- For HF4Y - Randomized Control trial

Evaluation:

- Developmental Evaluation
- Outcomes Evaluation

OUTCOMES

Outcomes are tied to the service delivery models. Because the focus of these interventions is not just on independence, but on healthy transitions to adulthood, outcomes go beyond a simple measure of housing stability.

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youth homelessness social innovation lab

HF4Y OUTCOMES AREAS

1. HOUSING SUPPORTS
2. HEALTH & WELL-BEING
3. ACCESS TO INCOME & EDUCATION
4. COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORTS
5. SOCIAL INCLUSION

1. Housing stability

Young people have:

- ✓ Obtained housing
- ✓ Maintained housing
- ✓ Enhanced knowledge and skills regarding housing and independent living
- ✓ Reduced stays in emergency shelters

2. Health and well-being

Young people have:

- ✓ Enhanced access to services and supports
- ✓ Improved health
- ✓ Food security
- ✓ Improved mental health
- ✓ Reduced harms related to substance use
- ✓ Enhanced personal safety
- ✓ Improved self-esteem
- ✓ Healthier sexual health practices
- ✓ Enhanced resilience

3. Education and employment

Young people have:

- ✓ Established goals for education and employment
- ✓ Enhanced participation in education
- ✓ Enhanced educational achievement
- ✓ Enhanced participation in training
- ✓ Enhanced labour force participation
- ✓ Improved financial security

4. Complementary supports

Young people have:

- ✓ Established personal goals
- ✓ Improved life skills
- ✓ Increased access to necessary non-medical services
- ✓ Addressed legal and justice issues

5. Social inclusion

Young people have:

- ✓ Built and/or reconnected to natural supports
- ✓ Enhanced family connections
- ✓ Enhanced connections to communities of young person's choice
- ✓ Increased access to necessary non-medical services
- ✓ Addressed legal and justice issues
- ✓ Strengthened cultural engagement and participation
- ✓ Engaged and participated in meaningful activities

Key question:

Does it work???
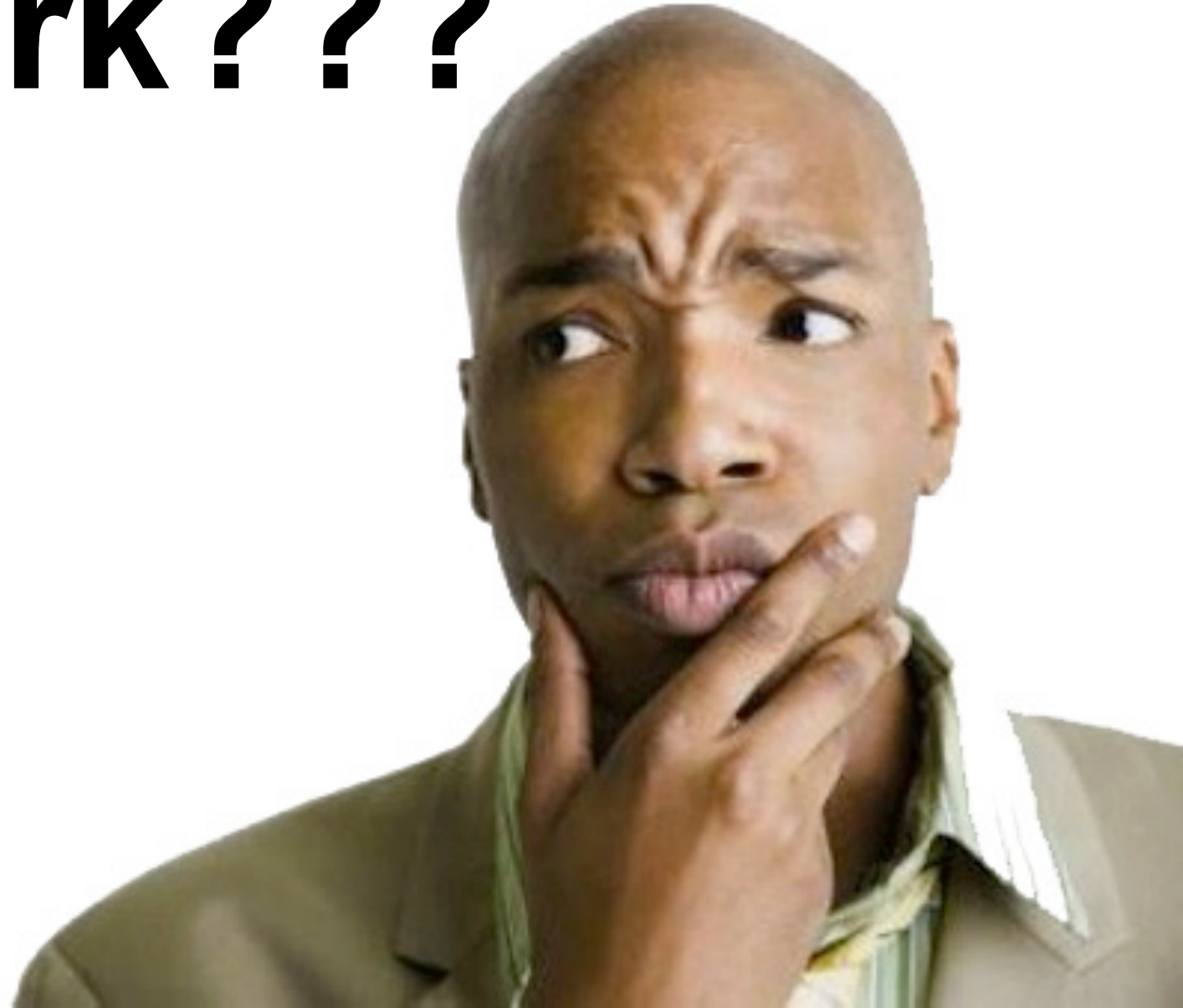
2 Research Findings

Research Evidence

There is empirical evidence to show that HF programs for youth:

Stabilize housing (Forchuk et al., 2013; Holtschneider, 2016; Kozloff et al., 2016) as well as improve feelings of **security** with housing (Brakenhoff et al., 2022; Holtschneider, 2016; Wood et al., 2024)

Demonstrate positive outcomes for many youth populations, including:

- Youth with **mental health problems or diagnoses** that possibly co-occur with substance use disorders or addictions (Bonakdar et al., 2023; Forchuk et al., 2013; Kozloff et al., 2016; Gilmer, 2016; Wood et al., 2024)
- Youth who **use substances** (Brakenhoff et al., 2022; Forchuk et al., 2013; Kelleher et al., 2021; Slesnick, Zhang et al., 2023)
- Youth experiencing notable **food insecurity** (Brothers et al., 2020)
- **Youth of color** (Brakenhoff et al., 2022; Holtschneider, 2016; Kelleher et al., 2021),
- **Indigenous youth** (Fraser et al., 2023)
- **Young mothers** (Slesnick, Zhang et al., 2023) and young families (Collins et al., 2019)
- **Youth with histories of child welfare involvement** and/or are leaving the care system (Bonakdar et al., 2023; Collins et al., 2019; Holtschneider, 2016)

Research Evidence

There is empirical evidence to show that HF programs for youth:

Improve physical health outcomes (Bonakdar et al., 2023) and **mental health** outcomes (Bonakdar et al., 2023; Forchuk et al., 2013), **decrease or prevent substance use** (Brakenhoff et al., 2022; Kelleher et al., 2021; Slesnick, Zhang et al., 2023)

Reduce inpatient admissions and increase use of outpatient services (Fraser et al., 2023; Gilmer, 2016), as well as reduce the need for hospitalization and emergency services (Fraser et al., 2023)

Increase **access to income** and overall financial stability (although youth often live in poverty and require overall greater access to income; Brothers et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2019; Fraser et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2024)

Support connection to peers/friends, reconnection to family and overall relationship quality, and reduce negative social influences (Forchuk et al., 2013; Holtschneider, 2016; Wood et al., 2024); and decrease child welfare involvement with young families (Collins et al., 2019)

Research Evidence

Evidence for HF programs for youth leaving care systems reveals that:

These programs are designed to support several life areas, including:

- Building social relationships; these include those with service providers at the host agency, as well as collaborating agencies; family, including those of origin and chosen, and other caregivers; romantic partners; children; and friendships.
- Youth also want support for neighborhood, community, and recreational participation; these goals are built and attained over time.
- Additional important outcomes for this population are improved access to services for alcohol and substance use, as well as mental health issues/disorders, and assistance attending various appointments.

Programs noted several outcomes: improved youth self-care, maintained improved community connection, improved access to education and educational attainment, improved mental health, and improved substance use and alcohol support services. Programs have also successfully supported youth to achieve housing stability.

Research Evidence

Evidence for HF programs for youth leaving care systems reveals that:

Program elements also matter!

- Intensive case management, including a **low staff-to-caseload ratio** and elements such as trauma informed care, motivational interviewing, community mediation teams to advocate for youth and educate about the HF4Y model, and de-escalation training to address difficult interpersonal situations, are often important for program design.

- Enhancing **Family and Natural Supports** promotes social inclusion

- Other important program elements include increased access to service delivery staff and 24-hour access to immediate/crisis support.

- Moreover, some programs incorporate peer support services. Youth indicate to service delivery teams that accessing this service enhances their program experience and perceived outcomes.

Research Evidence

Evidence for HF programs for youth leaving care systems reveals that:

On program limits and policy implications:

- The most commonly reported shortcoming is a lack of access to housing, making the HF principle of youth choice difficult to achieve. In addition to housing stock limits is a lack of quality housing. Participants may need to move as a result.

- Secondly, governmental system departments do not always have unified policies that improve their collaboration and remove structural barriers to accessing the intervention. This is further complicated by a lack of local government support with the HF approach for youth, creating the need for advocacy and education about how the HF approach supports youth.

- Finally, time-limited program funding as well as program age limits/requirements at times negatively impact youth by restricting their access to psychosocial and housing supports they require. This suggests the need for longer-term funding to increase program length, and increasing the age of youth served by programs to 29 or 30 years (i.e., the developmental period of young adulthood). Improved collaboration with adult systems is an additional important step.
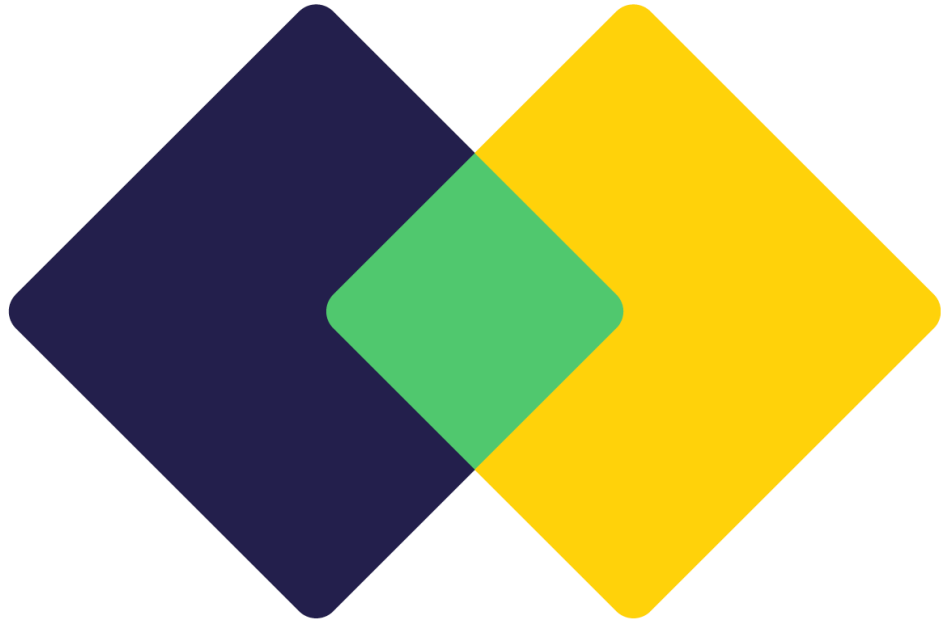
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Youth
Homelessness
Social Innovation Lab

3 Preliminary Outcomes Data
(24 months)

Objectives & Outcome Domains

Objectives

- **Assessing the efficacy of the HF4Y intervention**

- Identifying the areas that need **modifications** to tailor services to the specific **subpopulations**

What impacts are we assessing?

1. HOUSING SUPPORTS

2. HEALTH & WELL-BEING

3. ACCESS TO INCOME & EDUCATION
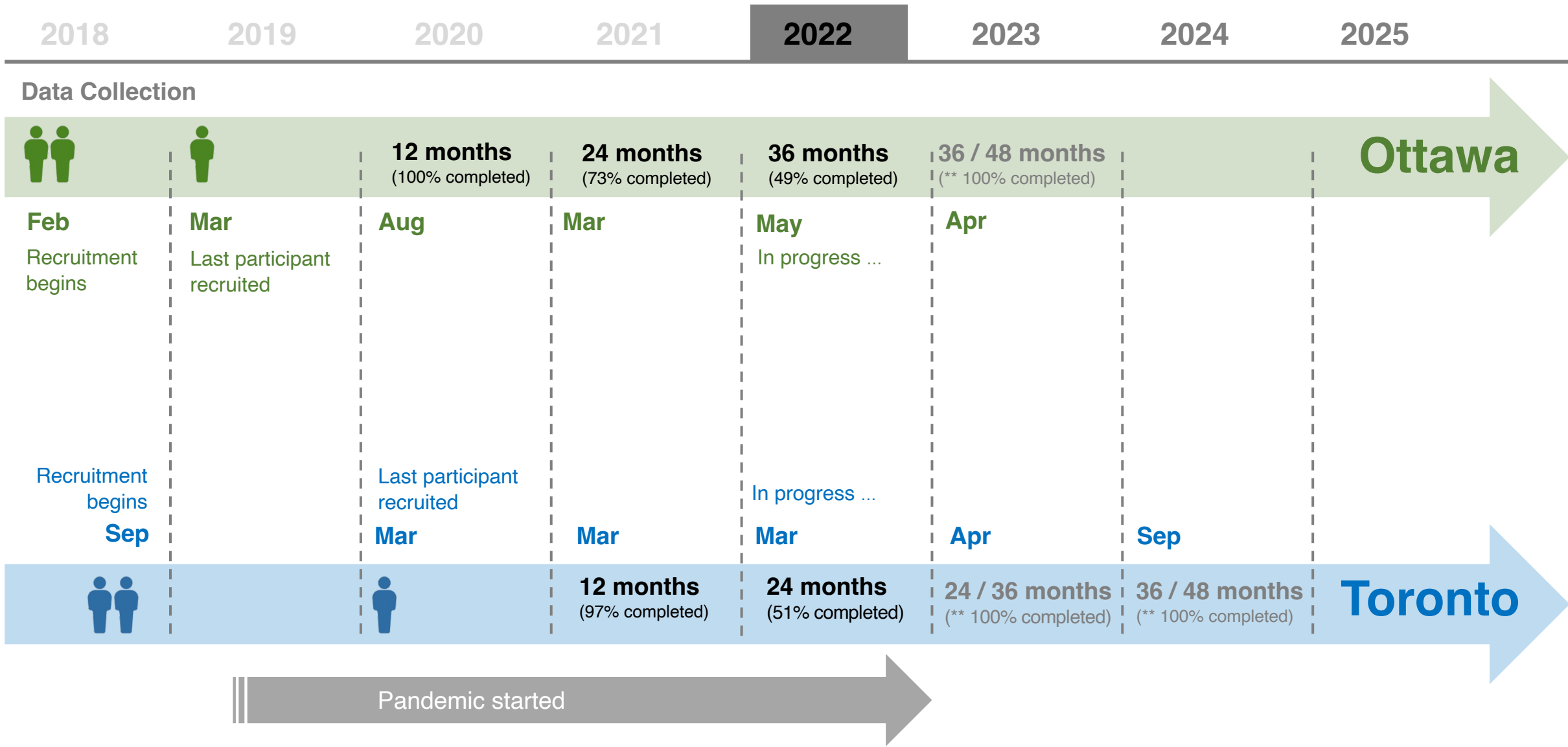
4. COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORTS

5. SOCIAL INCLUSION

Randomized Controlled Trial

Group 1: Receiving Housing First for Youth intervention

Group2: Treatment as Usual (TaU) - *NOT* receiving the intervention.

Data Collection

2018 **2019** **2020** **2021** **2022** **2023** **2024** **2025**

Ottawa

12 months (100% completed)
24 months (73% completed)
36 months (49% completed)
36 / 48 months (** 100% completed)

Feb — Recruitment begins
Mar — Last participant recruited
Aug
Mar
May — In progress ...
Apr

Recruitment begins
In progress ...

Sep
Mar
Mar
Mar
Apr
Sep

12 months (97% completed)
24 months (51% completed)
24 / 36 months (** 100% completed)
36 / 48 months (** 100% completed)

Toronto

Pandemic started

** Anticipated

		TOTAL		HF4Y		TAU	
Age	17-18	32.5 %	(n=48)	37.0 %	(n=27)	28.0 %	(n=21)
	19-20	43.9 %	(n=65)	41.1 %	(n=30)	46.7 %	(n=35)
	21-22	16.2 %	(n=24)	16.4 %	(n=12)	16.0 %	(n=12)
	23-24	7.4 %	(n=11)	5.5 %	(n=4)	9.3 %	(n=7)
Gender Identity	Woman	57.4 %	(n=85)	56.2 %	(n=41)	58.7 %	(n=44)
	Man	31.8 %	(n=47)	34.2 %	(n=25)	29.3 %	(n=22)
	Transwoman	2.0 %	(n=3)	2.7 %	(n=2)	1.3 %	(n=1)
	Transman	4.7 %	(n=7)	2.7 %	(n=2)	6.7 %	(n=5)
	Gender Fluid	3.4 %	(n=5)	2.7 %	(n=2)	4.0 %	(n=3)
	Declined	0.7 %	(n=1)	1.4 %	(n=1)	0.0 %	(n=0)
Sexual Identity	Straight	55.4 %	(n=82)	58.9 %	(n=43)	52.0 %	(n=39)
	2SLGBTQA +	43.9 %	(n=65)	39.7 %	(n=29)	48.0 %	(n=36)
	Declined	0.7 %	(n=1)	1.4 %	(n=1)	0.0 %	(n=0)

|		TOTAL		HF4Y		TAU	
Racial Diversity	Indigenous	6.8 %	(n=10)	9.6 %	(n=7)	4.0 %	(n=3)
	Racialized	7.4 %	(n=11)	4.1 %	(n=3)	10.7 %	(n=8)
	Black	32.4 %	(n=48)	41.1 %	(n=30)	24.0 %	(n=18)
	White	38.5 %	(n=57)	34.2 %	(n=25)	42.7 %	(n=32)
	Mixed	14.9 %	(n=22)	11.0 %	(n=8)	18.7 %	(n=14)
Country of Origin	Canada	76.4 %	(n=113)	71.2 %	(n=52)	81.3 %	(n=61)
	Outside Canada	23.6 %	(n=35)	28.8 %	(n=21)	18.7 %	(n=14)
Education	High School Inc	62.2 %	(n=92)	57.5 %	(n=42)	66.7 %	(n=50)
	High School cpl	20.9 %	(n=31)	24.7 %	(n=18)	17.3 %	(n=12)
	Post-Secondary Inc	12.8 %	(n=19)	12.3 %	(n=9)	13.3 %	(n=10)
	Post-Secondary cpl	3.4 %	(n=5)	4.1 %	(n=3)	2.7 %	(n=2)

Housing Stability

"My worker from Free2B has helped me a lot. Like, whenever I went any place to give in, like an application, like they'll think of me, like oh, you're too young, or we don't want to accept you because of your age. But this apartment, she actually came with me to go speak to the landlord and they said the same thing and she said that they're not allowed to do that. They have to accept my application. So – and then when they accepted it they took me in."
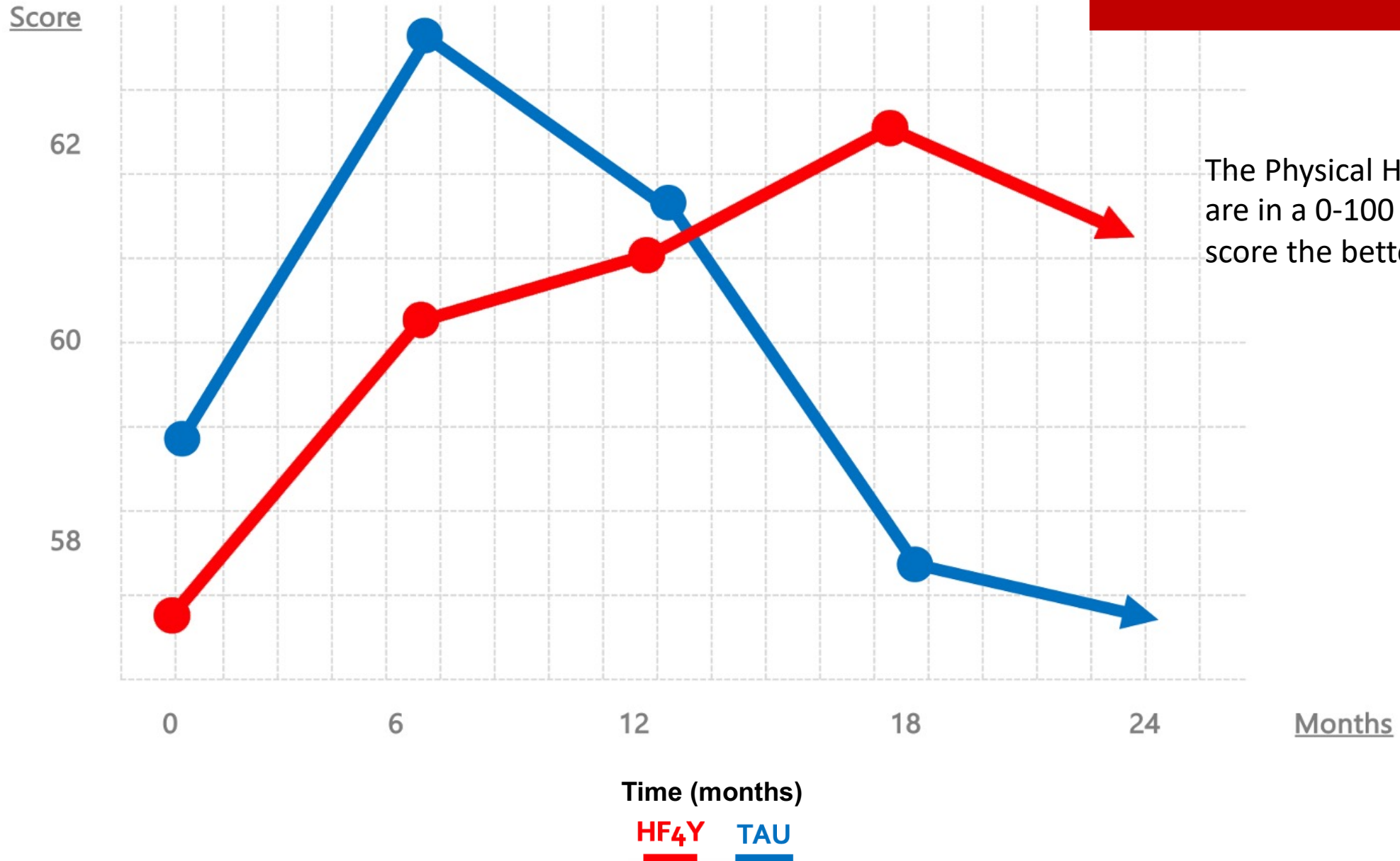
(Participant 2031)

Housing Stability

Proportion of Time Resided in Stable Housing Across 2 Years
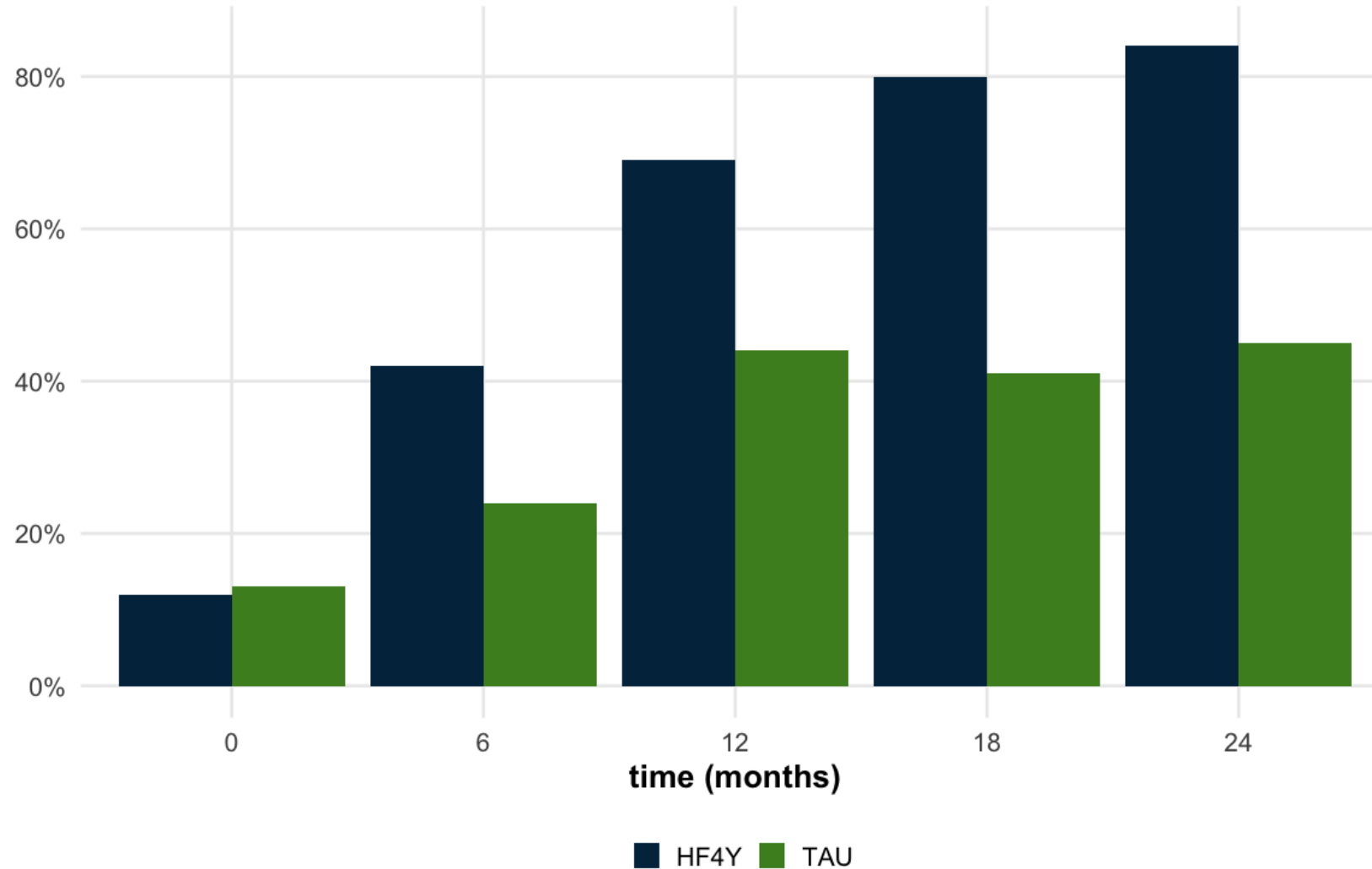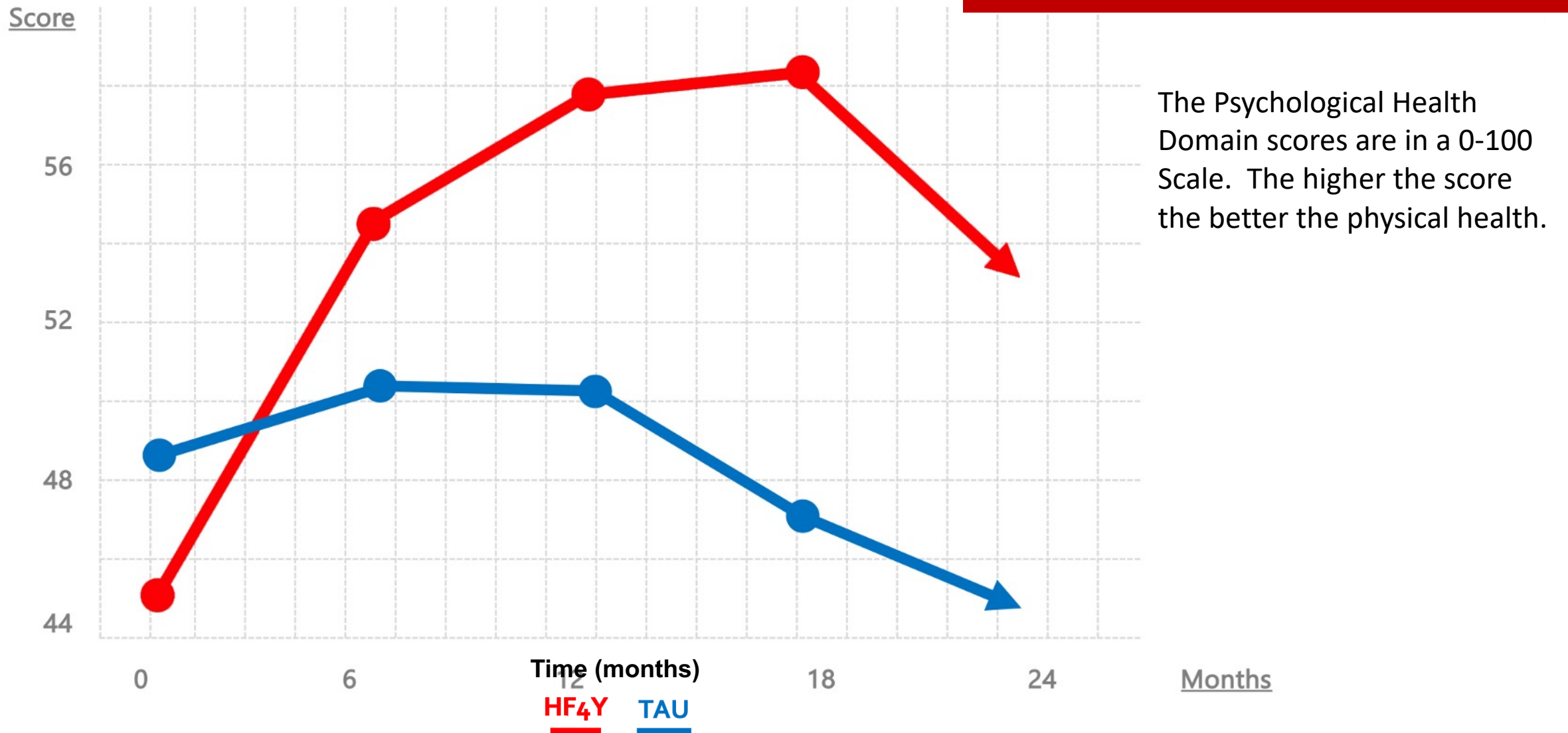
Health & Well-Being

Physical Health

The Physical Health Domain scores are in a 0-100 Scale. The higher the score the better the physical health.
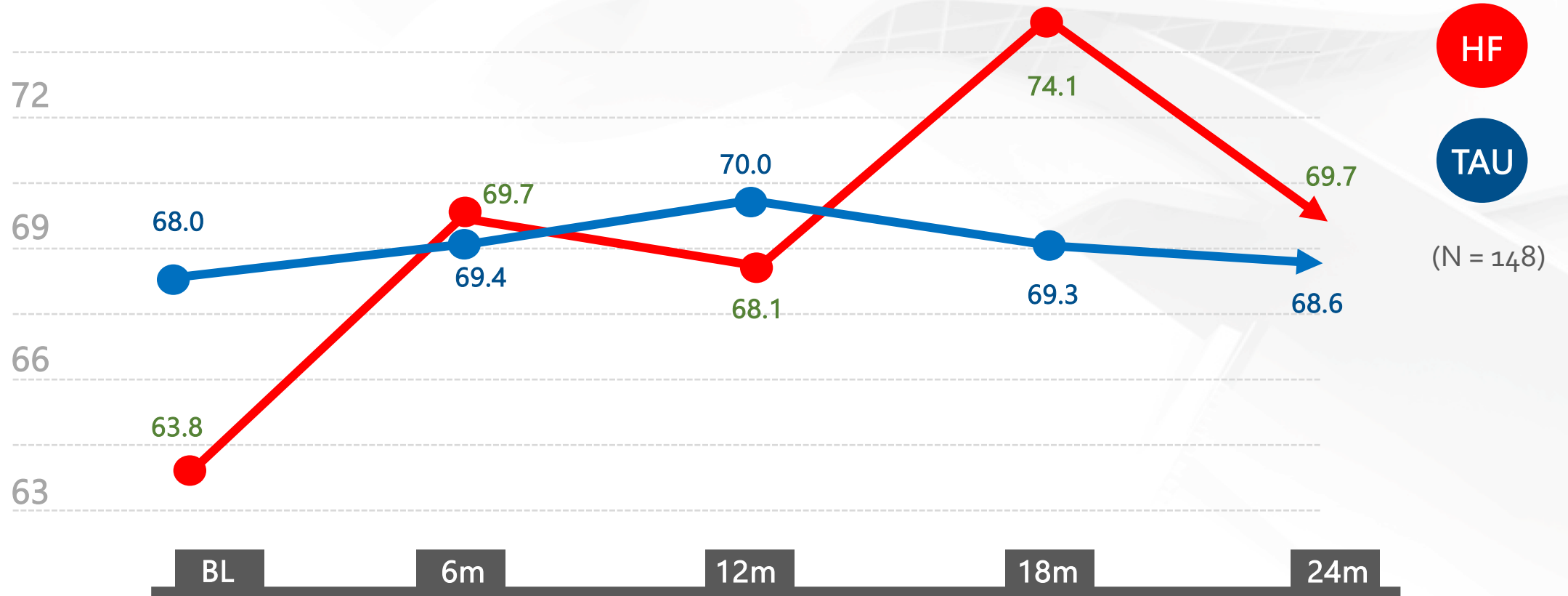
Psychological Health

The Psychological Health Domain scores are in a 0-100 Scale. The higher the score the better the physical health.

Resilience

RESILIENCE

The Resilience Scale-14

The total score ranges between 14 and 98 points. The higher the score the higher the level of resiliency.

HF

TAU

(N = 148)

72

69

66

63

68.0

69.7

70.0

74.1

69.7

63.8

69.4

68.1

69.3

68.6

BL · 6m · 12m · 18m · 24m

"She's absolutely amazing and I'm really glad I have been able to have her as a case worker. She's made sure that I have what I need and that I understand my responsibilities kind of in general, whether it's with work or my apartment, or in the program itself. Yeah, I don't think any of what I've done or any progress I've made would have been possible without having my case worker or being a part of the program."
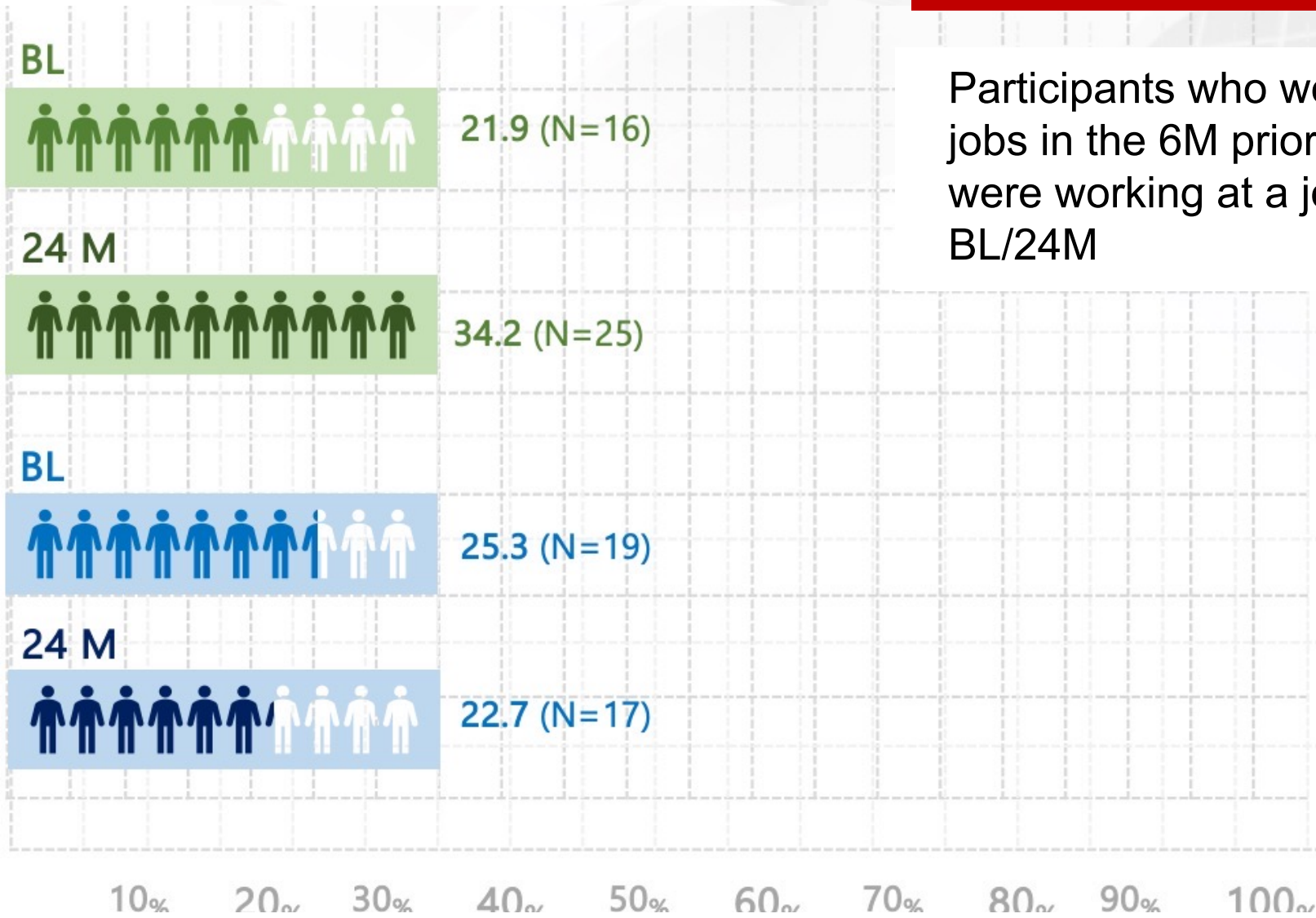
(Participant #1004)

Employment

Employment

Participants who worked 1 or more jobs in the 6M prior to BL/24M & who were working at a job at the time of BL/24M

"At first, I just tried to just figure it out myself and that didn't work out at all. I was like broke by the end of the week and then I had to wait another week for a paycheck, but [HF4Y worker name] taught me a lot about saving. Gave me like good budget ideas." (Participant #1049)

Education

EDUCATION

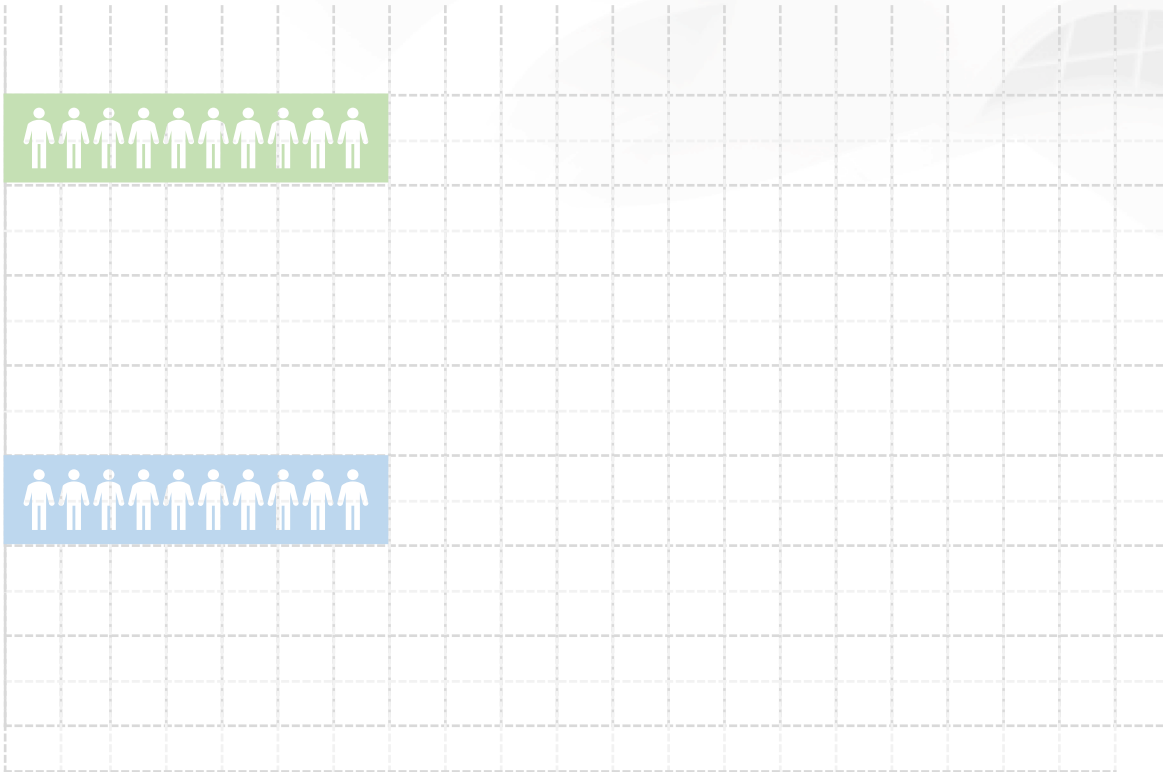Participants enrolled in school or GED program 6M prior to BL and 24 months

HF

N = 73

TAU

N = 75

EDUCATION

Participants enrolled in school or GED program 6M prior to BL and 24 months
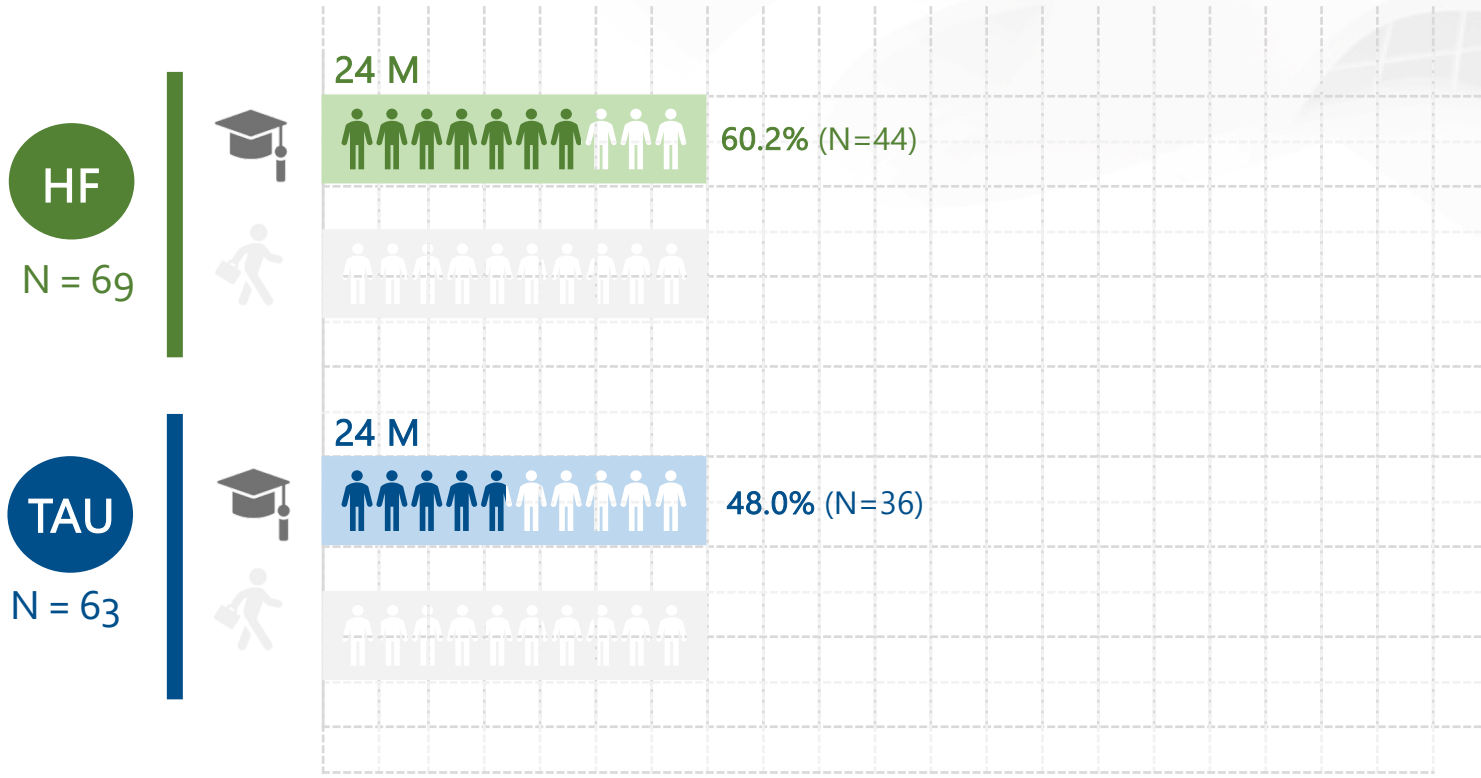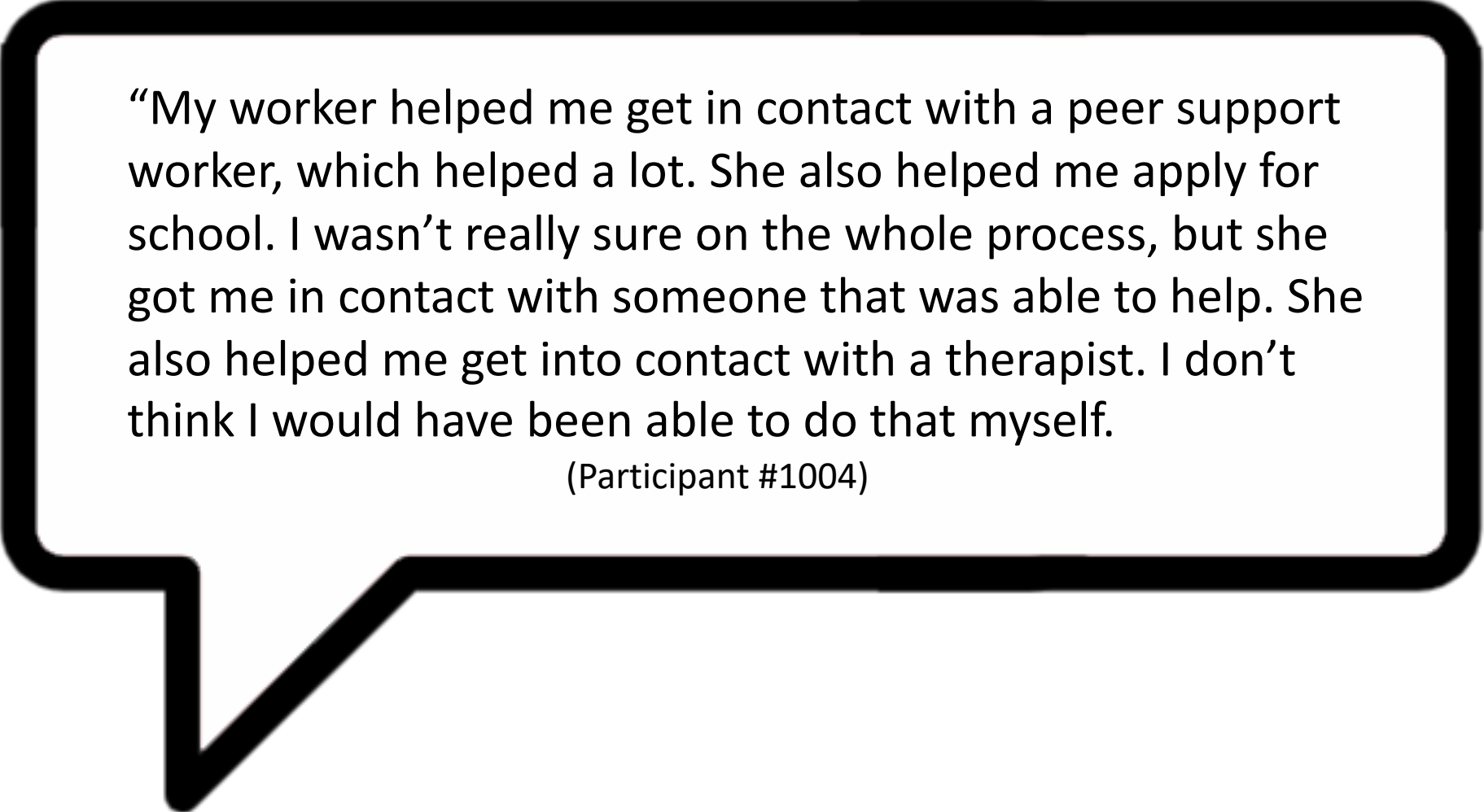
HF
N = 73

BL
45% (N=33)

TAU
N = 75

BL
42.7% (N=32)

EDUCATION

Participants enrolled in school or GED program 6M prior to BL and 24 months

HF

N = 69

24 M

60.2% (N=44)

TAU

N = 63

24 M

48.0% (N=36)

"My worker helped me get in contact with a peer support worker, which helped a lot. She also helped me apply for school. I wasn't really sure on the whole process, but she got me in contact with someone that was able to help. She also helped me get into contact with a therapist. I don't think I would have been able to do that myself.
(Participant #1004)

Relationships & Social Inclusion

Perceived Social Support
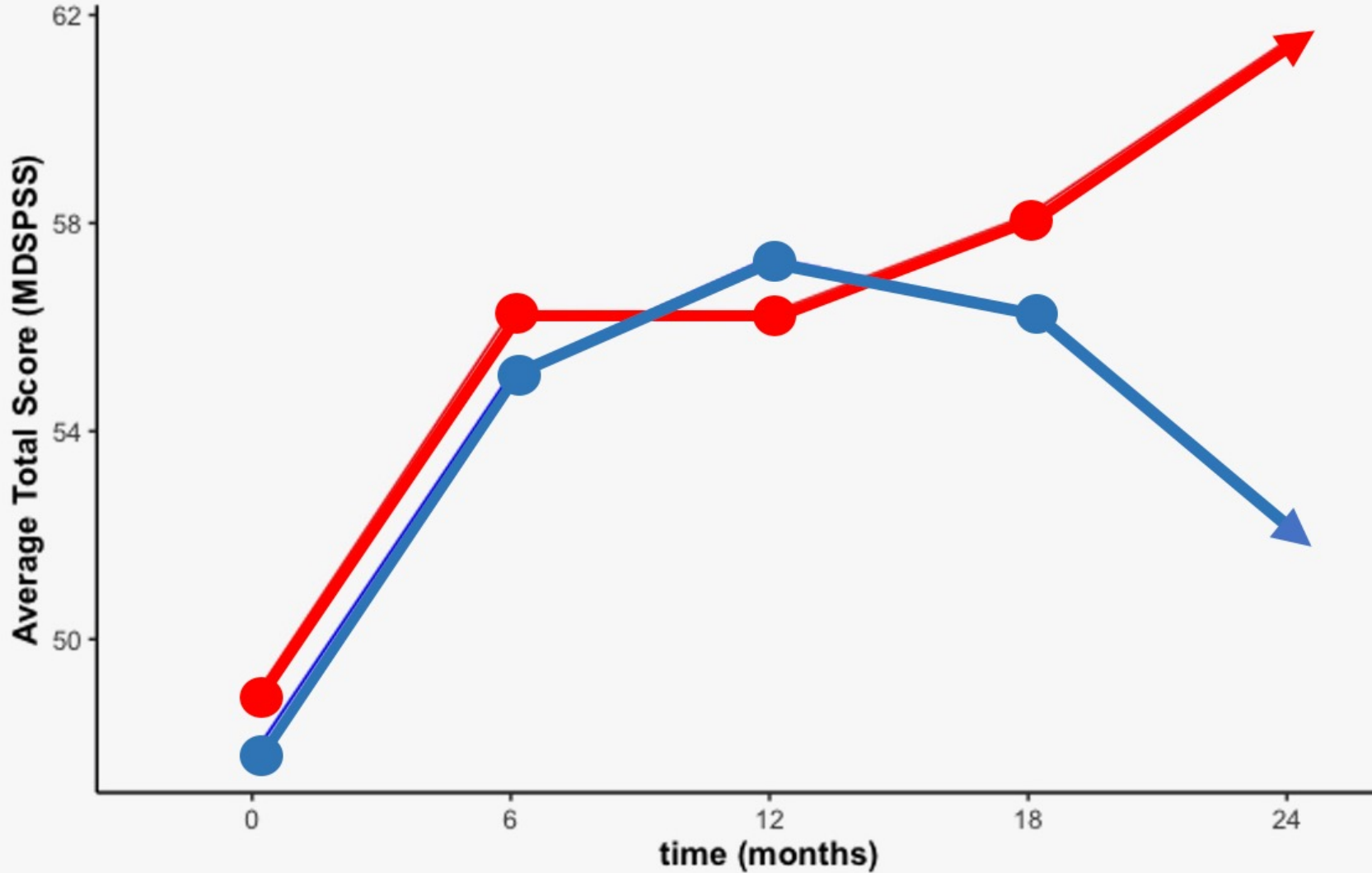
Quality of relationships with:
- Significant other
- Friends
- Family

Friends

Seven Point Scale is used:

1 to 2.9 considered low support;
3 to 5 considered moderate support;
5.1 to 7 considered high support.

- **HF4Y** group moved from moderate support to High.

- **TAU** group remained in moderate support category
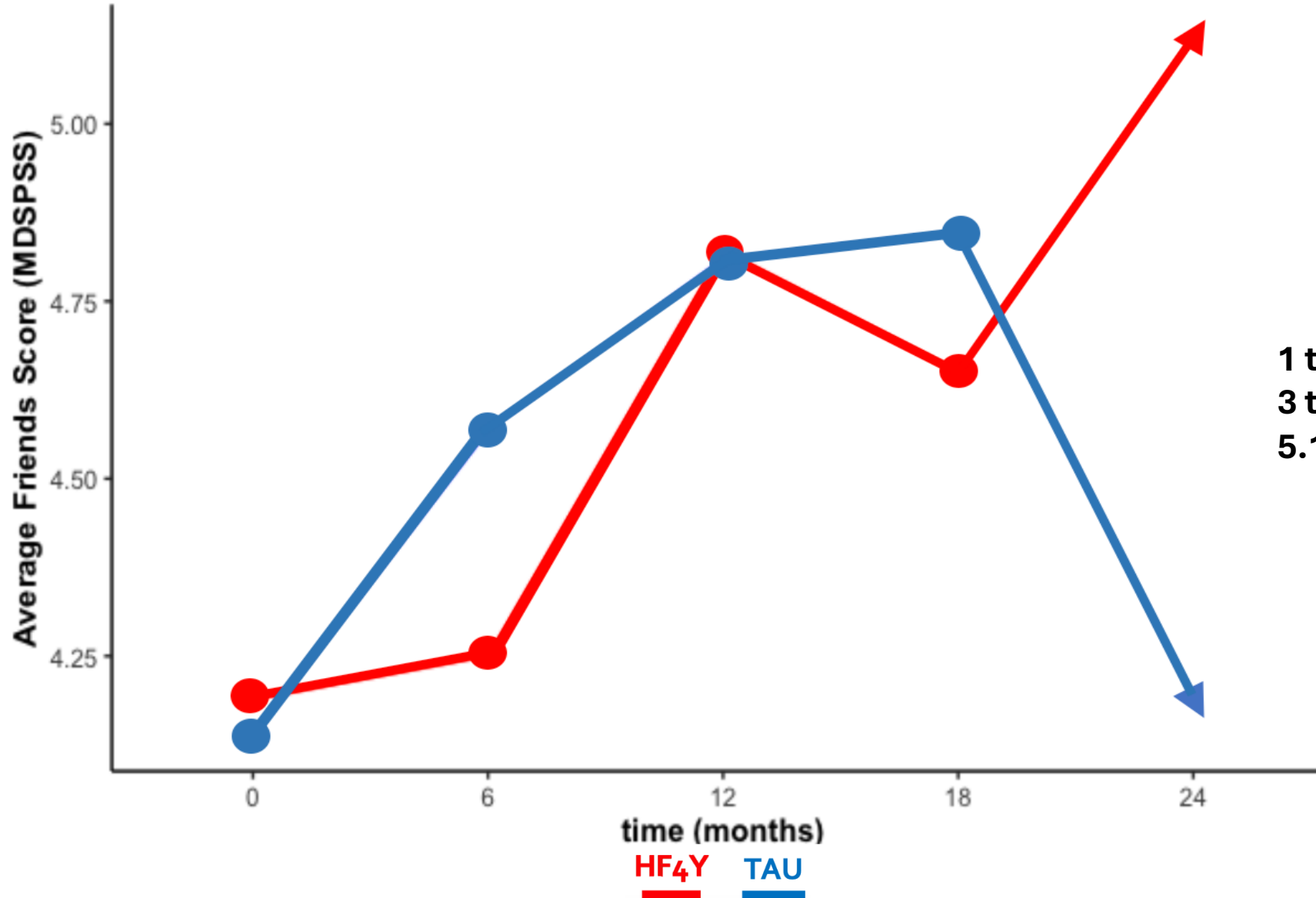
Significant Other

Seven Point Scale is used:

1 to 2.9 considered low support;
3 to 5   considered moderate support;
5.1 to 7 considered high support.

- **HF4Y** group moved from moderate support to High.

- **TAU** group moved from moderate to high support, but then regressed to moderate
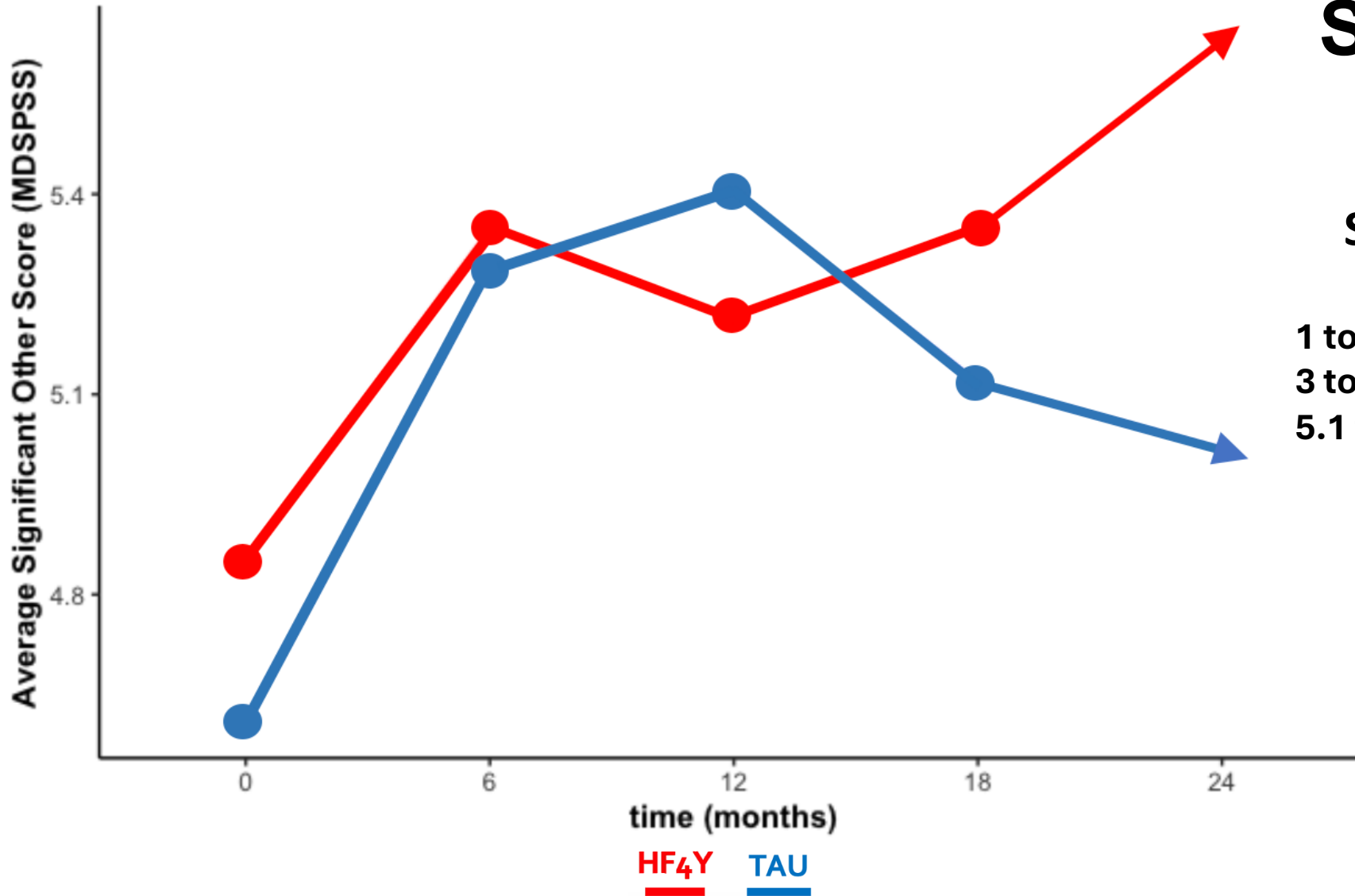
Perceived Social Support

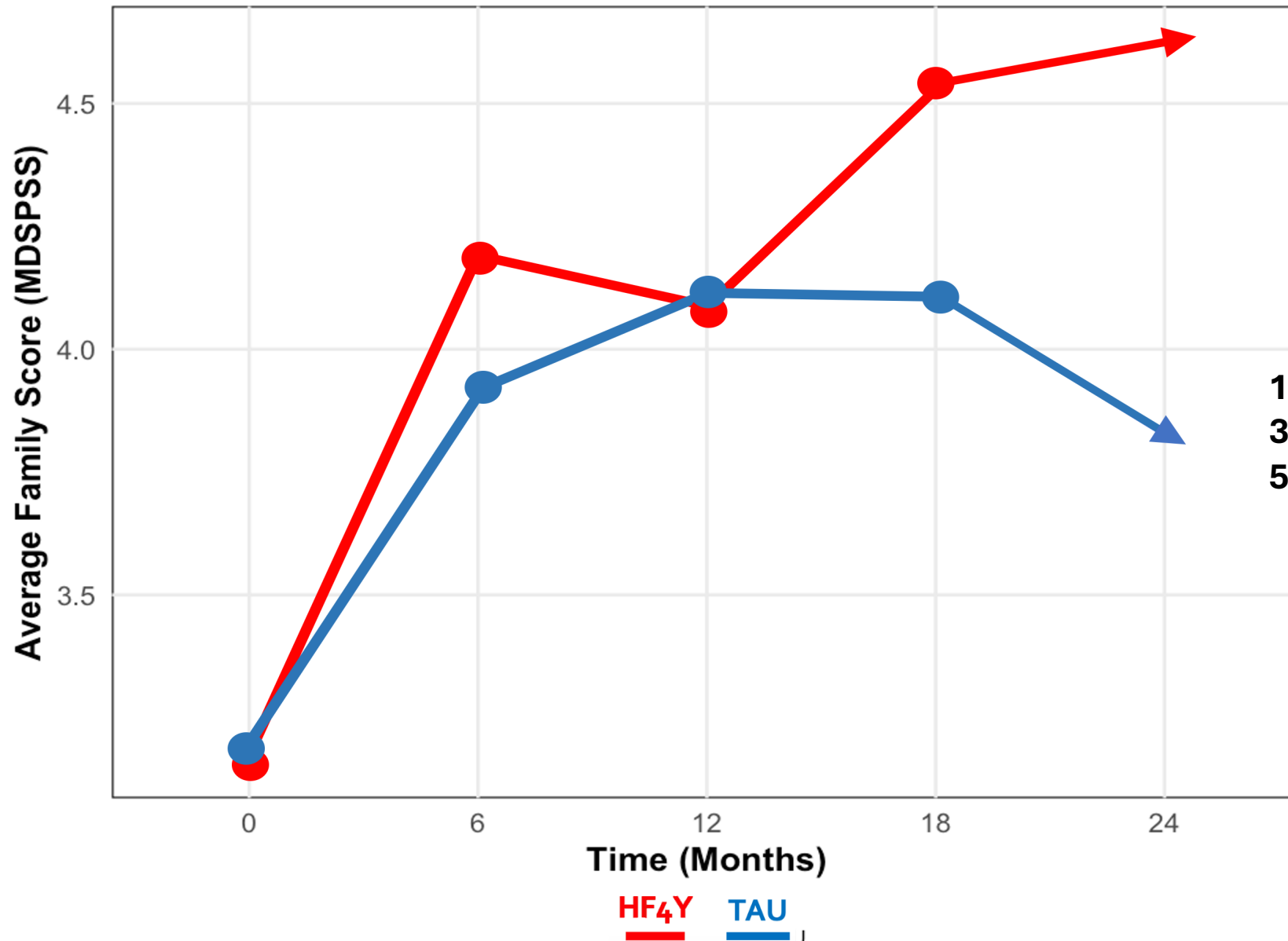## Family

Seven Point Scale is used:

1 to 2.9 considered low support;
3 to 5 considered moderate support;
5.1 to 7 considered high support.

- **HF4Y** group moved from low-moderate to high moderate support.

- **TAU** group remained in moderate support category

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Herth Hope Index (HHI)

The total score ranges between 12 and 48 points. The higher the score the higher the level of hope.
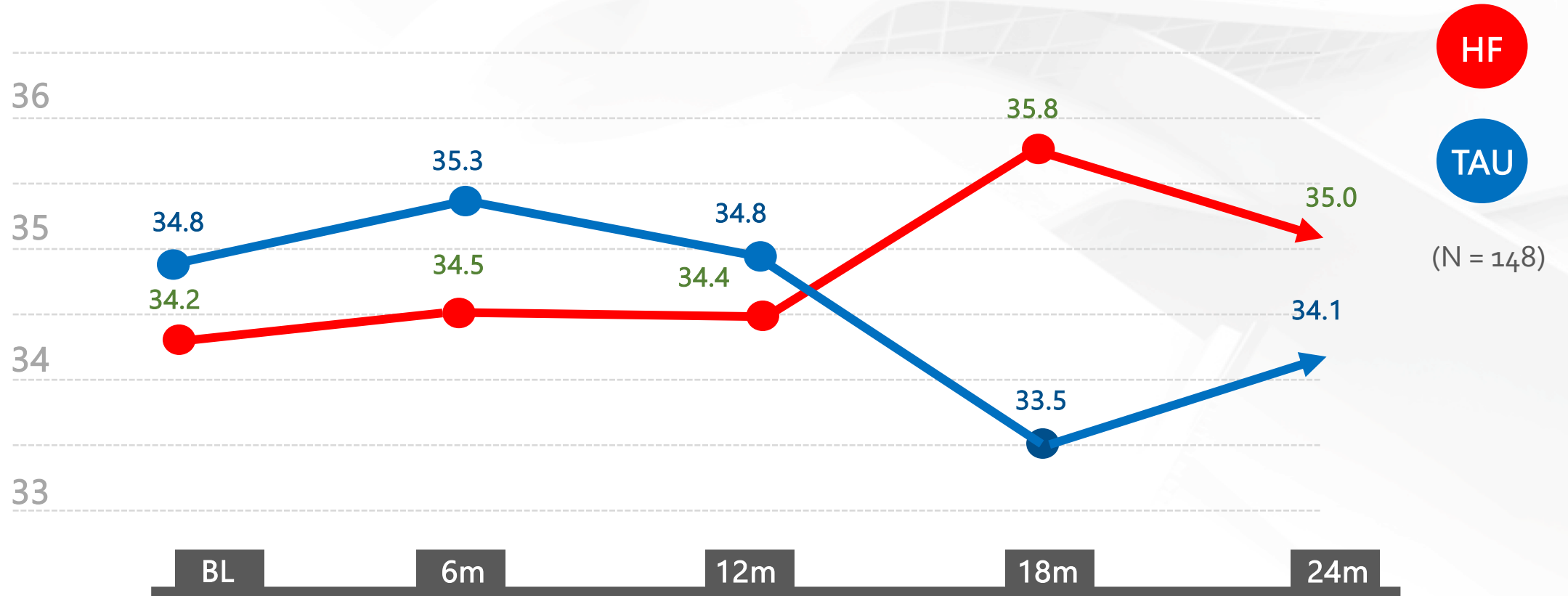
HF

TAU

(N = 148)

36

35.8

35.3

35.0

35

34.8   34.8

34.8

34.5   34.4

34.2

34.1

34

33.5

33

BL   6m   12m   18m   24m

"I want purpose in my life": A qualitative exploration of how homeless youth envision their futures

Minda Wood[a,b], Stéphanie Manoni-Millar[a,b], Athourina David[c,d], Cora MacDonald[d], Veronique Rochon[a], John Sylvestre[a,b], and Stephen Gaetz[d,e]

[a]School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; [b]Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; [c]Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; [d]Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; [e]Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT
Preparing for the future is a major developmental task during adolescence and early adulthood. However, youth experiencing homelessness face additional challenges relating to economic instability, housing insecurity, and a lack of social support. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 youth, from Ottawa and Toronto, who were experiencing homelessness and participating in a randomized controlled trial of Housing First for Youth (HF4Y). This qualitative study explores youths' visions for the future, including their goals, aspirations, plans, and barriers to achieving them. Overall, findings demonstrated that youth had positive visions of the future and strove to reach developmentally appropriate goals and responsibilities. Compared to youth receiving HF4Y, the future expectations of those receiving treatment as usual (TAU) were characterized by uncertainty and lacked clear direction. Additionally, they emphasized self-reliance and autonomy, while HF4Y prioritized forming relationships and reconnection. Findings highlight the importance of stable housing intervention, and social, community, and financial support in planning for the future and transitioning out of homelessness. Implications for intervention, directions for future research, and limitations are provided.

KEYWORDS
Future expectations; housing first for youth; qualitative; youth homelessness

In Western societies, youth typically participate in a variety of experiences in both formal (e.g., educational institutions) and informal settings (e.g., extracurricular activities) that prepare them for the roles and responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2007; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017). These experiences provide the foundation for the development of future expectations (i.e., goals, aspirations, and plans) which are linked to positive psychosocial outcomes and can serve as a buffer against negative outcomes (Beal &

CONTACT Minda Wood ✉ mwood043@uottawa.ca 🏢 School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, 136 Jean-Jacques Lussier, Vanier Hall 5081, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5, Canada.

"I want purpose in my life": A qualitative exploration of how homeless youth envision their futures

Wood et al. (2024)

Vision for the Future

Qualitative study – from interviews

The majority of youth in both the HF4Y and TAU had positive visions of the future, including optimistic goals, hopes, and aspirations.

HOWEVER

Youth receiving HF4Y tended to have more concrete, short and long-term plans in place for how they were going to achieve their goals and have their future expectations come to fruition.

Youth receiving TAU:

- Seemed to have a general sense of what they wanted their futures to look like but had no concrete steps or plans for how they might achieve this.

- expressed a fear of the unknown and a sense of uncertainty regarding the future

- seemed to lack the opportunity to envision the long-term future due to a preoccupation with figuring out the immediate future and overcoming daily hassles.

Wood et al.,(2024) (2024) "I Want Purpose in my Life": A Qualitative Exploration of How Homeless Youth Envision Their Futures. Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community.

Vision for the Future

Qualitative study – from interviews

Research highlights the need to prioritize **Youth Homelessness *Prevention!!!***

The longer a young person experiences homelessness, the less hope they have for the future, and the less likely they identify and actualize concrete steps to achieve a positive future.

"This sense of hope about the future tends to decline quickly over time, with youth reporting a significant decrease after one year of experiencing homelessness".

Wood et al.,(2024) (2024) "I Want Purpose in my Life": A Qualitative Exploration of How Homeless Youth Envision Their Futures. Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community.

"
My worker helped me get in contact with a peer support worker, which helped a lot. She also helped me apply for school. I wasn't really sure on the whole process, but she got me in contact with someone that was able to help. She also helped me get into contact with a therapist. I don't think I would have been able to do that myself.

HF4Y Participant
"

"
My worker from Free2B has helped me a lot. Like, whenever I went any place to give in, like an application, like they'll think of me, like oh, you're too young, or we don't want to accept you because of your age. But this apartment, she actually came with me to go speak to the landlord and they said the same thing and she said that they're not allowed to do that. They have to accept my application. So – and then when they accepted it they took me in.
"

4 Key Learnings

① **Housing First 4 Youth (HF4Y)** has the potential to be a **promising approach** to preventing and ending youth homelessness.

② Housing stability leads to other **positive life outcomes** (e.g., health and well-being, hope for the future, resilience)

Cure

Prevention

3 Providing housing should be **complemented** by a range of **other supports** geared to youth **development & wellness**

4 **Individualized support** and **tailored interventions** for youth (e.g., youth exiting child welfare services, Indigenous youth, 2SLGBTA+)

5 **Highlights the crucial importance of enhancing Family and Natural Supports**

6 It Works!!!!

Developmental Evaluation
Key Learnings

Implementation:

- Training and Technical Assistance
- Fidelity reviews
- Follow the evidence!!!

- Leadership
- Stable Funding

Practice

- Putting choice into Action
- Approach to case management
- Case loads – Between 7-10
- The centrality of enhancing Family and Natural Supports
- Graduation

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youth homelessness social innovation lab

Critical lessons and key learning to successfully scale up the HF4Y

Community Readiness for Implementation → **Research and Practice Relationship** → **Training and Technical Assistance** → **Collaboration between systems** → **Barriers to Longitudinal Research**

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) Demonstration Project | Emerging 24-month Findings ● S. Gaetz, C. MacDonald, & A. Bonakdar

"I'll have an ounce of prevention."

WHAT'S NEXT

Building an Evidence Base

HF for Indigenous youth

Refining Program Models

Set the Stage for Scale

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Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) Demonstration Project | Emerging 24-month Findings ● S. Gaetz, C. MacDonald, & A. Bonakdar

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Thank You!

Any Questions?

Contact: sgaetz@yorku.ca

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A WAY HOME VERS UN CHEZ-SOI

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