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MEDIA RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa releases strategy to cut health care costs, improve health care for street-involved youth

January 13th, 2009 – Ottawa – The Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa today released the most comprehensive study on the health of street-involved youth and outlined a practical strategy to address those needs.

The report, compiled by KPMG LLP, emphasizes the critical health care need not being met in Ottawa and draws on leading practices from other Canadian cities for an alternative model of service delivery.

Solution:

The KPMG LLP report lays out a business case for a youth health clinic to provide expertise in dealing with youth, continuity and comprehensiveness of care for street-involved youth. Not only would a clinic dramatically improve care for street-involved youth, it could save the health care system up to \$265,000 in the first year by reducing risks and deferring emergency room visits.

YSB Executive Director Alex Munter said that “in 2003, homeless young women in Ottawa accessed hospital emergency rooms 8 times more often than the rest of the homeless population. The KPMG LLP report speaks to a real need in our community and provides opportunities to make a difference in the lives of this vulnerable group.”

YSB is calling on the Government of Ontario to fund the expanded service for a demographic that overuses the health system while often not getting the help they need.

While some health services have been delivered continuously at the drop-in since 2004, the report recommends a comprehensive clinic service designed to meet youths' needs and take pressure off hospital emergency rooms. While located at YSB, services would be delivered by staff of the nearby Sandy Hill Community Health Centre. The 33-year-old health centre offers a broad range of prevention and primary care services and would operate a satellite clinic through YSB.

Report Highlights:

- Street-involved youth experience complex issues relating to mental health, addictions and chronic pain with few youth-friendly healthcare supports in Ottawa;

- Street-involved youth have a higher prevalence of chronic physical health conditions and have higher mortality rates than youth who are stably housed;
- Approximately 35% of emergency room visits by street-involved youth could have been diverted to a primary care system;
- Leading practices in other Canadian cities show that it is possible to deliver services in a way that is more cost-effective, and attune to the needs of this vulnerable population;

About the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB):

Every month, 2,500 or more youth aged 12 to 20 and their families come to YSB for help. YSB is a not for profit agency that offers a wide range of supports – from emergency shelters to mental health crisis support, from employment programs to custody facilities for those in conflict with the law, from drop-in centres to permanent housing, from school programs to individual/family counseling.