

## Book Reviews

Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 8(1), 2016, pp 255-258  
ISSN 1718-9748 © University of Alberta  
<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index/php/cjfy>

Karabanow, J., Carson, A., & Clement, P. (2010). Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth. Winnipeg: Fernwood Press.

Reviewed by: Shannon Bellamy, MacEwan University

Karabanow, Carson, and Clements' book, "Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth", provides a close in-depth look into the lives of Canadian street youth who are in the process of exiting street life; successfully or unsuccessfully. The main focus of the book is to examine the many complicated ways and means involved in disengaging from street culture, shown from the points of view of young people and service providers. Reasons for leaving the street and whether or not youth are successful depends on an infinite combination of internal and external factors. Karabanow, Carson, and Clement conducted their study in the following six Canadian cities: Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax. They retrieved their findings from extensive qualitative interviews with fifty service providers and 128 youths across these six major urban centers (p. 9). From these findings, the three authors concluded that there are six consecutive stages that street youth must complete in order to achieve successful street exiting. This book is smartly divided into chapters based on these six stages. Each of which is discussed further and elaborated on in great detail.

Karabanow, Carson, and Clement discovered that the complex and numerous processes incorporated into street exiting breaks down into six broad stages; these were derived from their interviews in which they came across "commonly experienced" (p. 13) steps of disengaging from street culture. The first stage involves thinking about leaving the street due to an experienced trauma, becoming uninterested in street life, or if survival is becoming difficult. The second

stage revolves around change in the form of coming to terms with the responsibilities in their lives, internal motivation, increasing self-esteem, and having care and support from loved ones. The next stage includes factors from stage two in relation to achieving things such as housing and employment, increased education and life skills, and dealing with personal and mental health issues. Stage four consists of completely transitioning away from street culture and becoming a citizen within mainstream society, which can mean leaving behind friends with which the youth created a sense of family and community. Stage four was found to be a more challenging stage. In the fifth stage, complete restructuring of the youth's routine is addressed in regards to housing, employment, education, and establishing some form of financial assistance. The sixth and "final stage has been termed 'successful exiting'" (p. 15). This stage encompasses the youth achieving an identity that is spiritually and emotionally stable and having reached a state of mental and physically healthy well-being (pp. 123-124).

Leaving the streets is a "cyclical process" (p. 11). It is not something that one accomplishes on their first try (p.11). In fact, it may take many attempts before one is successful. This can feel extremely defeating and lead to deterrence. This is why the advice of many service providers, and youths who have successfully moved off of the streets, to those youth still on the streets is that they must embrace the concept of "needing to be ready" (p. 38). They need to feel that sense of drive, they have to be prepared, and they have to be willing to put everything they have into the transition - it is imperative. If one is unable to do these things, then they should know that they are not ready; therefore, will almost surely be unsuccessful.

Youth living on the streets is an area of major concern and it is filled with misguided judgements, discrimination and stereotypes. Karabanow, Carson, and Clement aim to offer a more educated perspective on this topic in order to help those who may not be as informed or not

informed at all on this matter. They want to help them truly understand the challenges and obstacles that have caused youth to wind up on the streets in the first place and the ones youth encounter when they attempt to leave that life behind. Majority of the youth interviewed described how the availability of services was critical to their successful transition off the street (p.117). These services helped them to reconnect with mainstream society and become positive participating citizens. The four types of services in Canada that are available to those youth currently on or currently transitioning off the street, are those that provide medical assistance, therapy and counselling, skill building, and basic needs such as food and shelter (p. 118). Overall, there was “an equal amount of praise and criticism” (p. 70) from street youth about the programs available to them. The programs that received the most positive comments were those that offered more than one of these services at their location; but there is not many that offer this. Most locations only provide one of these services and youth are forced to go elsewhere in order to obtain different kinds of help. This presents a severe inconvenience to a subgroup of the population that already faces immense struggles and marginalization. It would be more beneficial to have a greater number of organizations that offer all the types of services that street youth need “(one-stop shopping)... in order to reach as many street youth as possible” (p. 121). Having these programs has become a basic need to youth living on the street because it provides “one of the few spaces in which youth feel safe and cared for” (p. 125). Having these types of feelings of knowing that people care about you is essential to transitioning off the street, and if these programs can provide this for street youth, then this in turn motivates them towards the idea of disengagement.

Karabanow, Carson, and Clements’ research illuminates the realities of life on the street. By interviewing the street youth themselves and the service providers (those on the front lines of

## Book Reviews

this dilemma) a full and empathetic understanding is created. I found Karabanow, Carson, and Clements' book to be an extremely interesting and intriguing read, full of information that opened my eyes to things about homeless youth that I had never even contemplated or thought about before. I did not even realize how large of a concern this issue was because I myself have never experienced, nor do I know anyone personally, that has experienced something like this. This book provides insight into the limitations, struggles, hardships, and problems that street youth encounter and face on a daily basis. It elaborates on the challenges and obstacles that can occur when a youth is making the transition from street culture to mainstream culture.

The book provides a broad understanding of life on the street, but brings attention to something that might be quite limiting to their overall findings. Karabanow, Carson, and Clements' study did not show any "major regional and gender differences in exiting patterns" (p. 10). Due to the fact that this research was conducted in major urban cities, "there could be urban-rural distinctions that are unaccounted for" (p. 11). This affects their overall ability to generalize their findings to all street youth as they did not include any research in their study on homeless youth that do not live in these major urban centers.

The contents of this book could be very beneficial to anyone interested in the topic of street youth and homelessness in Canada, including people in the fields of sociology, psychology, law, and education. Also, I feel this book is especially important to people in positions of making and changing government policies. Changes need to be made in the area of providing help to those on the streets and this book elicits the information needed in order to make these improvements.