A Place to Call Home - Prince George

Findings from the Youth Sexual Health Team’s Young Parents Study show that housing is a concern for Young Parents in Prince George (PG).

Did you know?

A single parent with one child receives $1,045 per month through Income Assistance (incl. shelter allowance).

Right now, the average rental cost for a 2 BR apartment in PG is $857, leaving little for other living expenses such as groceries.

Me and [my boyfriend] were looking for a place and I called and I was like, "Hey, I have two dogs and a daughter." And they’re, like, "We don’t accept children." There’s some houses that are only adult-oriented. I’m, like, "Is that legal?" And they’re, like, "Yeah." I’m, like, "I didn’t know that they could only make it for adults."
- Jade, young mom

For someone who moves, like, every year, for the past eight years, it’s terrible. I hate moving. That’s why I don’t hang pictures or anything on my walls.
- Olivia, young mom

On average, young parents in our study moved twice a year

One young father moved 12 times in the year before his first interview.

The place we were in got condemned. The BC Safety Authority came out, shut our breaker off. It almost burnt down. There’s burn marks all over my kids’ bunk bed from behind the outlet. So we had to move out that day when the BC Safety Authority came [and] said, "This is unsafe to live here. You need to get out."
- April, young mom

20% of young parents moved because of unsafe or unstable housing

All the cheapest spots or all the good spots that you could possibly get into are literally taken.
- Durzo Blint, young dad

30% of participants found that adults-only policies limited their housing options

Housing in PG is difficult to find, with a vacancy rate of 3.8%

I moved here just at the end of March so I’ve only been in here for two weeks. It’s nice, I like it. It’s a really good location. [My son] loves it ‘cause the park’s right there.
- Kara, young mom

14% of young parents moved because they found a better location

For more information, visit our website: http://youthsexualhealth.ubc.ca/
Attitudes towards young parents

Many young parents report difficulties securing housing because they have children, experience age discrimination and do not have enough references.

I was lucky to get that place. Before that I was looking and going to viewings and stuff and everyone’s like, ‘Oh, you have a kid? Never mind.’ Or, ‘You’re so young. You don’t have enough references,’ or just stupid little things like that. It was quite frustrating. Very frustrating. It’s like, ‘Yeah, I’m young. How do you expect me to get references if you don’t even let me live here so you can become a reference?’ So that was frustrating and the fact that people are so judgmental about me having a child. It’s like... gotta live somewhere.
– Heather, young mom

High and variable rental costs

Finding an affordable place to live is a problem for many young families. They also find it difficult to cope with unexpected rental increases, which strain already limited budgets.

The landlord changed and I had received a message saying that nothing was going to change and then suddenly they were like, “Oh, we’re upping the rent and we’re adding this fee.”
– Kezia, young mom

Some young mothers and fathers are able to obtain ongoing and emergency financial aid from local organizations. Ongoing funding for programs helping with unforeseen rental costs reduce a lot of stress in such circumstances.

I wasn’t advancing at work, and I was let go. It was kind of tough too because at the same time, welfare cut me off without even telling me. So I’m kind of behind on rent right now. I had to go to [a local Indigenous organization] for their help.
– Nanaboo, young mom

Unaffordable utility costs

Because of the cold winter in PG, young parents who do not have utilities included in their rent often struggle with the increased cost of high electricity and heating bills.

I moved out of that place ‘cause I was paying, like, $800 in hydro bills. It was all electric baseboard heat. It was atrocious.
– April, young mom

Study Participants

62 young parents (YPs), including 45 young mothers and 17 young fathers

Age
- 13 YPs 16-18 yrs.
- 22 YPs 19-21 yrs.
- 20 YPs 22-24 yrs.
- 7 YPs 25+ yrs.

Ethnicity*
- 43 Indigenous YPs
- 20 White YPs
- 2 Black YPs
* Ethnicities were self-reported; participants could select more than one ethnicity

Education**
- 22 some high school (HS)
- 25 currently in HS
- 7 graduated HS
- 5 some post-secondary
**Not all participants answered this question
Many young parents find that the appliances in their suites are not working properly and repairs are often not completed in a timely manner, which can lead to dangerous and stressful situations. Unsupportive landlords compound stresses.

“I got into an argument with our landlord ‘cause he didn’t fix the element in the oven. And it started to spark on us while I was making pizza. And I didn’t know what to do. I have never, ever seen that before. So I was freaked out. We got [my daughter] out of the house. I stood outside while [my boyfriend] was on the phone with the fire department. And then the landlord came and he got mad at us and he said, ‘Next time don’t call them and everything. Call me and all that.’ And I said, ‘Well, first of all, I don’t know what was going on with the oven. And I don’t know nothing about the elements.’ Like, it started to glow really blue.”
- Helen, young mom

The places that many young parents find to live are often not safe or healthy. This includes units that have issues with black mold, pests, water damage, faulty plumbing and non-functioning appliances.

“It wasn’t really a good house to have an infant in. There was lots of holes where bugs and stuff could get in. The basement door didn’t have a door handle. It just [had] a lock chain. And you could see through the door on the sides. There was big holes in between the doors. It just got worse as we stayed there. So we finally just got sick of it.”
- Joe Rogers, young dad

Many lower cost rental housing units are located in neighbourhoods which are not family- or child-friendly. Some young parents worry about the substance use of others in their communities and the safety of their children.

“I live in a bad neighbourhood and a really bad school catchment so I think we’re going to move over the summer. It is a really busy street and it is really scary being so close to the liquor store.”
- Maria, young mom

Rose's Story

Rose and her child had to move when she was 16 years old.

"I didn’t really decide to move out. The Ministry kind of said, ‘You can’t live with your mom,’ because she was doing drugs."

She was able to find supportive, low-cost housing through a local organization.

"I live at [organization’s] housing. One of my workers set me up with it. She thought it would be really good for me, so I pay $450 for a little townhouse. They’re brand new, like, they’re really nice. I love my house."

Other young parents and their children would benefit from similar supports.
Sophia moved away from her family and home, on a reserve, to secure a more independent life for herself and her child.

"The community I grew up in, everyone knows your business. So if you go to the hospital, two seconds later they know why you're there. So I wanted to move away from that."

Sophia persevered and found another place but encountered trouble receiving her mail.

"[My upstairs neighbours have] been taking my mail... yeah, I need to figure that out 'cause um, I lost my I.D. in January. Applied for it and then I was supposed to get it in the beginning of February, and I didn't get it till the middle. And then I didn't get my son's medical card till just recently. I had to go to their door and ask for it."

Sophia found a rental in PG and was excited to make a home with her son. However, she soon found that there were problems with the suite.

"It's a basement suite, so it's pretty fairly sized for us. When I went in, it was moldy in the bathroom and... the washer didn't work and the dryer need fixing."

When Sophia decided she needed to move her son out of that suite, she found little availability on the rental market.

"Every place that I've sent an email to never bothered to email me back."

Sophia did her best to fix what she could, but did not get the support she needed to stay in her new home.

"I'm gonna be moving pretty soon. My baby's been getting sick in that house a lot. There's black mold in the bathroom."

The increased cost of the new rental made Sophia wonder if she should move back home to the reserve.

"We just have so much bills to catch up on and can't afford to stay here right now."

To secure an affordable place, Sophia made sacrifices.

"It was pretty hard to find a place. We weren't originally looking for an apartment just because the no privacy thing, having to worry about who is under you and who is on top, but I couldn't find any basement suites that's affordable, so we just started looking into apartments and this apartment building is actually very family-oriented."

Sophia continues to search for a basement suite where she and her son will feel safe, healthy and comfortable, yet also meets her budget.

"I would] like a basement suite, like what I had before. The place I was at has more space than this one. I miss the yard and having that privacy."