



# *Belonging*

How your support impacts youth.



**Covenant  
House**  
Vancouver



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## To our Covenant House Vancouver Family,

I can hardly believe that it's been two months since youth moved into our new building at 1280 Seymour St., let alone that it's been 25 years since Covenant House Vancouver opened its doors! I've seen a remarkable amount of change in my 17 years here, but the heart and soul of what we do has remained constant: supporting youth in crisis with unconditional love and absolute respect.

Moving into this new flagship building has given us an opportunity to reflect on our past, as well as look forward to the opportunities ahead, as you'll see in this issue of Belonging.

The biggest change that I've seen over the years has been a consistent move towards providing youth with more nuanced, effective care. When I started in 2005, there were really only three paths available to youth: we helped them apply for income assistance and find a place to rent; we helped them find a job to the same end; and we supported them to enter treatment for addictions. We understood that mental health and trauma played a significant role in the lives of these courageous young people, but our primary focus was to find them housing.

**“The biggest change that I’ve seen over the years has been a consistent move towards providing youth with more nuanced, effective care.”**

Unfortunately, without wrap-around services and complex care, housing alone often isn't enough to change the course of a young person's life.

If you know anything about how CHV operates today, you can see how incredible our program growth has been. Very soon after I started, we began focusing on the holistic well-being of youth, with actions like hiring social workers and clinical counsellors, creating specific programming for marginalized groups, and supporting youth to heal their trauma.

Nothing exemplifies this diversification of services like our new building. The addition of spaces to be creative, to read and study, to be physically active, and to sit quietly and reflect, are a testament to our commitment to helping youth create better, richer lives for themselves.

**“...the heart and soul of what we do has remained constant: supporting youth in crisis with unconditional love and absolute respect.”**

Another constant over the last 25 years has been the commitment of our community. Every time we took a step forward, you were there alongside us, helping us offer each young person at Covenant House exactly what they need to create a better future. Thank you for supporting us through the years, the changes, and the extraordinary growth.

With gratitude,

*Meaghan Watson*



MEAGHAN WATSON  
Manager, Crisis Program





1997

### Covenant House Vancouver opens

12 beds are available for youth experiencing homelessness.

2002

### Rights of Passage (ROP) opens at 326 Pender St.

CHV opens ROP, a more structured housing program for youth who wish to improve their life skills and transition to independent living.

2007

### Mental health & addiction services are introduced

CHV conducts a pilot project with what will eventually become the Foundry to offer mental health and addictions counselling to youth in our care, and educate youth workers about mental health support.



2008

### We hire our first social worker

From this point on, each youth at CHV has their own dedicated social worker.



2012

### We hire our first life skills coordinator

Life skills like budgeting, meal planning, resume writing and other essentials become part of what youth learn when they stay with us.



## 25 YEARS OF IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH

Over the course of 25 years, Covenant House Vancouver (CHV) has grown in size, depth, and breadth of services that we offer. We now understand that when youth have access to support that goes beyond shelter, food, and other basics, their lives post-CHV are drastically better and more stable. Over time, we've worked hard to enhance what we offer and tailor our services to what youth experiencing homelessness truly need to lead rich, fulfilling lives, once they leave our care. On the following pages you'll find examples of milestones in our service delivery that we're most proud of.

2014

### The female-identified Crisis Program opens

Female-identified youth now have a space to feel safe. Occupancy is growing quickly, as news of the program spreads.

*Previously, both male-identified and female-identified youth were housed together.*



2022

### 1280 Seymour opens

The new building allows us to drastically increase our services by offering enhanced art and recreation programming, counselling and therapy, and educational support.

*Learn more about these spaces on pg. 12*



Unconditional Love  
**25 YEARS**  
 Absolute Respect  
 Relentless Support

2015



### Introduction of trauma-informed care

Trauma is recognized to be an almost universal experience of youth experiencing homelessness. At Covenant House, we begin to train staff and adapt our practices to avoid re-traumatizing youth, and to help them heal.

2021



### First survivor leadership position

The Anti-Human Trafficking Department hires a staff member with lived experience of trafficking, to help shape our approach to youth who have been trafficked.

2021

### Harm reduction pilot

In response to the devastation of the opioid crisis, CHV begins providing harm reduction kits to youth, and naloxone and other addiction-specific training to frontline staff.



2021

### Ethical storytelling

With guidance from Covenant House International, we implement new ethical storytelling standards, to ensure that we are speaking about the young people at CHV in a way that is respectful and empowering.





## BUILDING 2SLGBTQAI+ COMMUNITY THROUGH ART

The first week that youth moved into our new building, our art therapist, Dr. Keith, and social worker, Michelle, ran a Pride-themed art event in our beautiful new studio. The art studio is a dedicated space for art therapy sessions including joyful, celebratory events like this one. Here, youth were able to use art as an expression of their joy and empowerment.

It was also the first time that young people from different programs were in the same space together, and a meaningful opportunity for them to connect through shared experiences. Fifteen youth, all of whom identify as 2SLGBTQAI+, spent time together making art in preparation for Pride and shared stories about their experiences of being queer.

Taylor and Alex\*, two young people who came here as refugee claimants, were overjoyed at the prospect of participating in an

The studio was an explosion of glitter, rainbows, and trans colours. Youth and staff made posters, banners, and costumes for the upcoming Pride Parade to celebrate and strengthen their community.

The day also turned out to be a learning opportunity for the young people. Dr. Keith shared stories about his first Pride Parade in the 1990s and the AIDS crisis that affected the gay community at that time. Many youth in attendance were unaware of this history and all of the changes that have happened in the 2SLGBTQAI+ community over the last few decades.



↑ For the first time in our 25 year history, Covenant House Vancouver walked in the 2022 Pride Parade as a show of solidarity with 2SLGBTQAI+ youth.

Staff were also able to learn from youth about how Pride could be more inclusive. A few of the trans youth who attended felt it was still hard for trans people to be seen and valued at Pride. A good example of this was Dr. Keith's own experience of shopping for the event. He had a much more difficult time finding items in trans colours (white, pink, and blue) than rainbow colours. Despite the positive changes that we've seen in the last few decades, youth at CHV always remind us to stay open and advocate for more acceptance, respect, and love.

Overall, a feeling of belonging permeated the room that day, making the new art studio space feel warm, welcoming, and full of joy.

\*Names have been changed to respect the privacy of youth staying at CHV



↑ Pins designed by CHV youth, which were distributed at the 2022 Pride Parade



↑ Decorations for our vehicles were produced in the 2SLGBTQAI+ art session described in this story.

event that would celebrate their sexual identities. They came from a country where they could not safely live as a queer couple, and were in awe that they would be able to openly walk down the street with other queer individuals and be loved for who they are.



## SPORTS & RECREATION

The gym and recreation room have been a huge hit since youth moved into 1280 Seymour, and physical activity has become even more of a cornerstone for our youths' wellness. Each of our three programs have designated times when they can use the space, and we also host open sessions of activities like pick-up basketball, floor hockey, badminton, and other sports.

Physical activity is an essential aspect of a healthy life, and it also provides youth with an outlet for processing emotions and relieving stress.

## THE ROAD AHEAD: NEW SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

The first few months in our new building at 1280 Seymour have been full of excitement and many positive experiences. But any big change comes with challenges as well, and our frontline staff have been working hard to make sure that all youth feel comfortable and supported in their new home.

In just a few short months, staff and youth have collaboratively transformed the space to meet their needs, and are preparing for some impactful programming in the future.



## ENHANCED ART THERAPY

Art therapy is an incredibly popular form of counselling for youth at CHV and has been shown to help the brain heal from complex trauma. The introduction of an art studio at 1280 Seymour has been a gift to the young people here. Our registered clinical counsellors have been offering open studio times, group art therapy sessions, and one-on-one sessions in this beautiful space. Programming also now includes studio time specifically for men, women, and 2SLGBTQAI+ youth.

*(Read more about one of our first group activities in the art studio, on page 10.)*



## LIFE SKILLS WORKSHOPS

In the future, our classroom space will host tutors and education-specific classes, but it's already been well utilized by youth workers. In August and September, one of our life skills coordinators hosted some fun workshops for youth, including a soap-making class, which taught youth more about hygiene and self-care; a smoothie-making class, to discuss the importance of nutrition; a vision-board workshop, during which youth discussed their big-picture goals; and a spa day to reinforce the importance of self-care.





## MEDICAL CLINIC

Our 1302 Seymour building is seeing some big changes, as well. In September, CHV partnered with the Foundry to open a primary care medical clinic onsite, allowing youth to access more of the services they need under the trauma-informed umbrella of CHV. This clinic is a satellite of the Foundry's Granville St. location and is open Monday – Friday to support youth.



## SPIRITUAL CARE

Spiritual care and practice are essential pieces of healing and growth for many of the young people at CHV. Previously, space had been at a premium, and it was often challenging for youth to find a quiet location to pray, meditate, and see to their spiritual needs. The Wellness Room in our new facility is now filling that gap. As a small space intended for individual practice, the Wellness Room has soothing representations of the four elements: an essential oil diffuser to represent air; a large jade plant to represent earth; smudge or incense to represent fire; and, to represent the fourth element, the latest addition – a small water feature. This space may eventually see some group breathwork or meditation practice, but for now it's dedicated to quiet, individual, spiritual practice – and the youth are taking full advantage of that.



## DONOR STORY: MAUREEN AND IAN MORRISON

Maureen and Ian Morrison remember when they were living in northern Ontario and receiving Covenant House Toronto calendars in the mail for Maureen’s mom, who was a big supporter of the organization. When she passed away in 1985, they decided to continue her legacy. When Covenant House Vancouver opened in 1997, Maureen and Ian had already moved to BC, and wanted to support the young people living in their community.

It wasn’t until decades later that they discovered that Covenant House played a crucial role in the life of Maureen’s younger brother, Andy.

By the time he had been adopted, at the age of two and a half, Andy had already been in ten different foster homes. “He was a challenging young man to deal with, but he was so smart. He had a lot of good qualities too,” said Maureen.



Andy left Maureen’s family home when he was in high school and wound up on the street. Over the years, they lost touch, but reconnected in 2010 after Andy had a heart attack. It was then that Maureen learned that Andy had been the first young person through the doors of Covenant House Toronto.

“It felt so good knowing Covenant House was there for him,” said Maureen. “I’m sure it broke my mom’s heart that he was on the street.”

Less than a year before his death, Maureen’s brother Andy was able to reconnect with his former youth worker in Toronto. The youth worker was retiring and asked Andy to give a speech to donors

about how Covenant House had impacted him. Andy’s wife, Diane, told the family that this experience inspired him to stop using drugs completely. Sadly, he passed away a month after his heart attack.

“It’s heartwarming to know that Covenant House was a significant part of Andy’s life, twice,” said Maureen. “I feel like Covenant House is part of our family.”

When Maureen and Ian first arrived in Vancouver, it was a shock to see all of the young people who were experiencing homelessness. As a result, Maureen and Ian have become strong advocates for CHV. They’ve been known to stop and talk to youth who appear to be experiencing homelessness, and have directed them to our services.

Both Maureen and Ian feel naturally drawn to supporting young people. Ian was even a Cub Scout leader when their children were young, and loved to take kids on adventures.

### “I feel like Covenant House is part of our family.”

“The thing that gets me going is when you get to introduce kids to something they’ve never seen before, and the light bulb goes on over their heads like, ‘Wow, is that ever cool!’” He explained.

Recently, Maureen and Ian came to the opening event for our new building at 1280 Seymour St. They were so impressed with the facility that they were the last two out the door. They were particularly inspired by the art room and the opportunity it gives young people to express themselves.

“It’s like another language, and they can talk to anybody in that language,” said Ian. “It may also reveal something about the youth that they may not be prepared to talk about.”

Maureen feels like her mother would be thrilled to see her and Ian continuing to support our work.

“Mom would have been happy to know that the involvement that started with her, lives on.”

**A sense of belonging  
can only be developed  
with time and intention.  
Thank you for 25 years  
of support, generosity,  
and care.**



**Covenant  
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Vancouver

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