

FALL 2023

Belonging

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How CHV Helps



Covenant
House
Vancouver



Covenant House Vancouver
acknowledges with gratitude
that our work takes place on the
traditional lands of the x^wməθk^wəy̓əm
(Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh
(Squamish), and səliwətał
(Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.

LETTER FROM THE CEO

“Without safe, affordable housing to transition to, their journeys towards health, wellness and independence are greatly impacted and become stalled.”



To our donor family,

I am excited to write this first letter to you as the new CEO of Covenant House Vancouver (CHV).

In some ways it's fitting that my first communication with many of you is dedicated to exploring the impacts of the affordable housing crisis in Vancouver. Having worked and lived internationally for many years I returned to BC in March of 2020, just as the pandemic was closing doors across the city. I'd heard that the lack of affordable housing in Vancouver had intensified, but I was unprepared for the level of crisis that I encountered upon my arrival.

Having worked in the health and social services field for the majority



of my career, I can resolutely say that the connection between housing and a person's health is incredibly strong: you simply cannot have good health without a home. The young people who come to CHV have taken the first brave step towards a better future. While they're with us, they work diligently towards achieving their goals and expanding their life skills in order to transition to independent living. Without safe, affordable housing to transition to, their journeys towards health, wellness and independence are greatly impacted and become stalled.

In this issue of *Belonging* you'll learn more about what we do at the local level to provide young people with housing supports and options, though our work doesn't stop there. We also focus attention upstream to influence policy and decisions made at the provincial, federal and even global level. I'm particularly excited to be building some significant new partnerships with organizations that will help us share our knowledge and

expertise with a broader audience. These partnerships will ultimately result in better outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness everywhere.

Housing is so much more than having a roof over one's head: it represents stability, safety, comfort, and hope. Thank you for partnering with us in our commitment to provide this basic human right to the deserving young people at Covenant House Vancouver.

With gratitude,

DEB LESTER
CEO, COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER



YOUTH NEED HOMES

THE STARK REALITY OF THE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

In recent years, the dream of finding a safe and affordable place to call home has become increasingly elusive for many young people in our community.

7



Housing affordability has reached an all-time low, with rental prices soaring to unprecedented heights. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development now ranks Canada as having the most expensive housing market among all other G7 countries.¹ Metro Vancouver has witnessed a surge in competition for rental units, leaving countless young individuals struggling to secure a stable living environment. A recent liv.ca² rental report states that the average monthly cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Metro Vancouver is \$2,406. The City of Vancouver's cost is even higher, at an average of \$2,849 per month. As a result, most young people who move out on their own find themselves sharing their residence with numerous unfamiliar roommates, a situation that is often marked by unreliability and frequent turnover – and they often still must pay over \$1,000 per month for a room.

At the heart of this crisis is the bleak reality of the dwindling number of affordable housing units. The consequences of this shortage are far reaching. Many of the youth who live at CHV are compelled to stay with us longer than usual, as suitable independent housing options remain scarce. Sadly, the lack of available beds at CHV has meant that numerous young people seeking sanctuary and shelter have been turned away, exacerbating their vulnerability and increasing the urgency of the situation.

“The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development now ranks Canada as having the most expensive housing market among all other G7 countries.”

Government supports, such as income assistance and disability benefits, fall significantly short of bridging the gap between youth's needs and the average cost of rent. The difference between these inadequate resources and the actual cost of living only deepens the struggles faced by those we are committed to assisting.

ADDITIONAL BARRIERS FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Adding to the complexity of this issue are the unique barriers that youth experiencing homelessness encounter.

From grappling with trauma, abuse, and mental health challenges, to growing up in foster care, to discrimination based on race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and ethnicity – the young people that CHV works with face a plethora of challenges in addition to the cost of living. Landlords often do not wish to rent to youth who lack essential life skills, employment history or references. The absence of a supportive family or community network further compounds their difficulties, leaving them particularly vulnerable in the face of this housing crisis.

Yet, amidst these challenges, rays of hope and progress are emerging. Thanks to the steadfast backing of compassionate donors, CHV is dedicated to bridging the gaps that linger within our community.

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Whether it's the addition of 19 new self-contained living spaces into our Rights of Passage program, our commitment to supporting youth in securing and maintaining housing within the community, or our emerging role in advocating for essential policy changes – CHV stands unwaveringly by the side of our youth on every step of their journeys. Read more about how CHV supports youth from a one-size-fits-one approach on page 14.

¹ Canada's Housing and Rental Affordability Crisis. Tony Bonen and John Pasalis. Canadian Economics, The Conference Board of Canada, May 24, 2023.

² August 2023 Metro Vancouver Rent Report. Greg Park. liv.rent, August 4, 2023.


³ Income Assistance Rate Table, Government of British Columbia, August 1, 2023.

\$610



The maximum amount an individual can receive per month from income assistance is \$610

\$983.50



The maximum amount an individual can receive per month from disability assistance is \$983.50³

\$2,030



A person who works full-time, making minimum wage in BC, takes home approximately \$2,030 per month

\$2,849



The average monthly cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Vancouver is \$2,849



DID YOU KNOW? The average length of stay in the Crisis Program is 96 days, more than three times pre-pandemic levels





Stephen lived with his parents in Prince George until they decided to move to Vancouver Island, and Stephen decided to move to Vancouver with his friend. Shortly after moving to Vancouver, Stephen's friend was arrested and taken to jail. Renting a hotel room alone, Stephen quickly burned through his money. "I'd never been homeless, until Vancouver."

Stephen discovered CHV and during his intake, was asked about his substance use. He admitted that occasionally he used alcohol and cannabis, but that he was working on quitting.

Stephen came to CHV during the pandemic and, in accordance with the recommended guidelines at the time, he was required to spend the first 14 days in isolation. Although he felt comfortable at CHV, the isolation got to him, and Stephen decided to leave. A couple of days later, he realized that he had made a mistake and came back.

After a month at CHV, Stephen found a job and a place to live.

However, Stephen's friend was released from jail and Stephen found himself caught in an unhealthy cycle — he would find a place to live, his friend would move in, and Stephen would soon lose his apartment. "I have a thing about helping people who are not necessarily good for me. My best friend is addicted to opiates and that's who I kept letting back into my life. He would always ruin it for me."

"Renting a hotel room alone, Stephen quickly burned through his money. 'I'd never been homeless, until Vancouver.'"

Stephen was using alcohol and cannabis more, but he always returned to CHV. "They were always open for me to come back."

"If I took a step back and then I looked at my life, I'd be like, how did this happen?"

YOUTH STORY: STEPHEN

**CHV
WAS
ALWAYS
THERE
FOR ME**

Stephen* is an amicable young man who always worked, had a roof over his head, and supported those less fortunate than himself. Stephen had always been fiercely independent and didn't like to ask for help.

** Name and photo have been changed to protect the youth's identity*

Stephen began accepting help from CHV, including letting staff give him rides to appointments, and receiving support to earn his Traffic Control Person certification and WHMIS certification.

“I ended up talking with CHV staff and they helped me get into treatment and into detox. And that was a big step for sure.” Stephen then stayed at CHV for his longest duration ever.

Stephen is now living independently in a micro-suite, and his life has improved dramatically. Building a routine, he comes to CHV every day for meals, he accesses Covey’s Cupboard to help him with his weekly groceries, and he uses the clothing room. CHV has also helped Stephen learn about setting boundaries with his friends, and the youth workers support his decisions to stay focused on his goals.



DID YOU KNOW? 80% of youth improved or maintained their capacity to manage housing



Through Vancouver Coastal Health, Stephen is studying to be a peer support worker. “A couple of years ago, I wouldn't have imagined that I would have a career; that I would become a support worker and help people. I’m learning how to help somebody that's homeless or struggling with addiction. I’ve experienced a lot of what we’re learning, but now I’m understanding why I’ve done those things.” When the course is finished, Stephen will be placed in a practicum and then will receive his certification.

Stephen has also been able to help his friend. “I was able to get him into his own place. I got him where he needed to be so that he could get help. Far enough away from me, because I'm not going to risk losing my place again.”

“I got places I could be, but I choose to come here. They want me to do good and not veer off into trouble. It's like Covenant House has just been there for me to get my grounding and get my head in order. No other place is close to being this helpful, this good.”

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STEPHEN
COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER

HOW CHV HELPS

CHV is taking strides to address the affordable housing crisis head-on, by offering comprehensive programs that go beyond basic shelter supports. These will equip young individuals with the essential life skills, mental health resources, education and employment readiness needed to live a sustainable life of enduring independence.



Navigating the path towards independent living is a difficult journey that is fraught with obstacles for youth experiencing homelessness. CHV recognizes the multi-faceted nature of these challenges and has developed a wraparound approach to ensure that young people can both find housing and successfully retain it. At the heart of CHV's initiatives are our innovative, highly-effective and supportive housing programs: the Crisis Program and the Rights of Passage program.

The Crisis Program, with a capacity of 60 beds, plays a pivotal role in catering to the immediate needs of youth who have found themselves living, or at risk of living, on Vancouver's streets. The Crisis Program offers wraparound care that provides a safe haven for those in dire situations, allowing youth to find temporary refuge, while they work towards their long-term goals. The Crisis Program acts as a bridge and a sanctuary, to ensure that these young individuals are not left without support during their transition to stable independence.

“CHV recognizes the multi-faceted nature of these challenges and has developed a wraparound approach to ensure that young people can not only find housing, but also maintain it successfully.”

Excitingly, Rights of Passage (ROP), our supportive independent living program, is expanding. Prior to the current renovation of our Pender building, ROP housed up to 25 youth at one time. Once the renovation is completed in early 2024, ROP will gradually expand and welcome up to 44 youth.

This expansion will also free up space in the consistently full Crisis Program. ROP's self-contained units offer both a home and a community, where youth can experience autonomy and security. The program provides a nurturing environment for youth to work on their educational pursuits, career aspirations, health and wellness. Our dedicated youth workers and social workers are available 24/7, standing as pillars of unwavering support.

In addition to our on-site housing programs, we also have a partnership with Hollyburn Properties, who provide three fully furnished apartments to youth from the ROP program. Youth can live in a Hollyburn suite for up to 12 months, where they practice skills like applying for an apartment, paying (reduced) rent, communicating with a building manager, and for the most part, living independently. At the end of their stay in a Hollyburn suite, youth can take the furnishings that have been provided with them, and the rent they've paid is given back to them as a nest egg to pay the deposit at their next residence. A similar financial model — mock renting — is used in the ROP program.

Youth who are residing in our on-site housing programs and the Hollyburn program, as well as those from the community who utilize our Drop-In Centre and Outreach services, have access to a full range of services such as recreation, art therapy, counselling, case management, and a wide range of life skills supports.

At CHV, every youth we welcome can find a helping hand when it comes to housing. Our array of housing-focused services is as diverse as the individuals we support.

WE HELP BY:

EVALUATING A YOUNG PERSON'S READINESS FOR HOUSING

LENDING A HAND IN HOUSING SEARCHES

ADVOCATING FOR YOUTH WITH PROSPECTIVE LANDLORDS

OFFERING GUIDANCE THROUGH BC HOUSING APPLICATIONS

ACCOMPANYING YOUTH TO PROPERTY VIEWINGS

PROVIDING REFERENCES

PROVIDING TRANSPORTATION ON MOVING DAY VIA OUR TRUSTY VAN

ENSURING ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD ITEMS ARE READY UPON THEIR MOVE

AIDING IN BUDGETING AND GROCERY PLANNING

NAVIGATING INTERACTIONS WITH LANDLORDS

EXPLAINING HOUSING BYLAWS



Our dedicated housing workers, life skills workers and community transition workers are just a call or text away, ready to answer any query, no matter how big or small, that the youth might have.

CHV's commitment to youth extends far beyond providing a roof over their heads. Addressing the housing crisis is not merely about housing; it's an holistic approach that addresses the full spectrum of a young person's needs. From enhancing essential life skills to fostering educational pursuits and improving employment readiness, our wraparound approach is designed to empower youth with the tools they need to thrive independently.

“Addressing the housing crisis is not merely about housing; it's an holistic approach that addresses the full spectrum of a young person's needs.”

100%



100% of youth who moved out of ROP last year transitioned to a stable setting and maintained their housing

96%



96% of youth say “Covenant House has helped me”

83%



83% of youth say that they feel more confident about their futures

“As we look to the future, we’re certain of one thing: we cannot solve the housing crisis alone. The power of partnership — of likeminded souls uniting for a common cause — must be harnessed to provide youth with the housing and support they deserve. Thank you for partnering with us on this essential mission.”

DEB LESTER

CEO, COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER





**Covenant
House**
Vancouver

1280 Seymour Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 3N9
604-638-4438 • covenanthousebc.org



@covenanthousebc