

SPRING 2024

Belonging

How your support impacts youth.

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Remembering Rosalie Segal



**Covenant
House**
Vancouver

Covenant House Vancouver acknowledges with gratitude that our work takes place on the traditional lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səłl̓wətaʔt̓ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.



To our wonderful donors,

I am so excited to introduce myself and open this issue of *Belonging*, which is focused on Covenant House Vancouver's low-barrier programming.

Approximately five months ago, I joined CHV as the new Director of Clinical Services and Complex Care. My role involves overseeing Drop-In and Outreach, which we call Community Support Services (CSS), and the Case Management department. As a result, I have the opportunity to observe the customized care that takes place for each youth and to learn from the hard work that our staff is doing on the frontlines, each and every day.

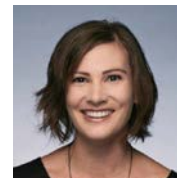
Having spent years working to develop provincial policy related to youth mental health and substance use, low-barrier programming is close to my heart. The challenges that youth encounter are complex, and our job is to ensure that they don't face further obstacles when they reach out for support.

In recent months, CHV has observed a number of changes in CSS; we are working with higher numbers of young people than ever before — almost twice as many youth per day as we were seeing previously — and we are also welcoming a greater number of newcomers to Canada. Many of these young people fled war, violence, and trauma in their home countries, and it is our duty to provide them with comprehensive, holistic care in our programs and services.

Despite the profound difficulties that so many young people encounter, I am inspired by the resilience of the youth we serve, the strength and dedication of our staff, and the commitment of our donors. Without your support, none of our work would be possible.

With sincere gratitude,

STEPHANIE GILLINGHAM
DIRECTOR, CLINICAL SERVICES & COMPLEX CARE



From Trauma to Triumph — Reem’s Journey to Independence

YOUTH STORY: REEM

Reem grew up in the Philippines in an oppressive patriarchal household. When Reem was only 10, her mother travelled to Canada without Reem and her siblings to try to create a better life for their family. Reem was left as the primary caregiver for her younger siblings and her childhood was filled with abuse and fear. She describes the experience as “a mother’s worst nightmare.”

After years of acting as a parent, Reem came to Canada with her siblings to be with their mom. “I had been the primary caregiver for my siblings for 12 years, and that identity was taken away from me [when I began living with my mother]. I didn’t know who I was outside of that scope.” Having two matriarchal women in the household led to conflict, until Reem finally left home.

Reem arrived at CHV in 2020 at the age of 22 and moved into the Crisis Program. “I just knew that I was in the right place because they were very respectful of my feelings and my boundaries. Trust followed when I met my social worker the next day, and she heard my story and the first thing she asked me was to share my dreams and goals. I knew that I picked the right place.”

Reem graciously accepted the wraparound care offered to her at CHV. This included a year-long commitment to one-on-one counselling sessions. Reem was also connected to CHV’s Lead Spiritual Care Practitioner, Kadee. Kadee provided Reem with a prayer mat, a prayer outfit, Tasbeih (prayer beads), and henna cones, so that Reem could celebrate and fully immerse herself in her first Ramadan in Vancouver.

Reem’s social worker felt that Reem was ready for the next step in her journey and advocated for her to transfer into CHV’s Rights of Passage (ROP) program. In ROP, Reem applied for scholarships, became involved in the Mentorship Program, and received housing support. Reem worked with her social worker to learn about safe relationships, healthy boundaries, and how she could reach her goals sooner.

While in ROP, Reem decided to try something out of her comfort zone. She entered the Miss Philippines International of BC Pageant, which she won. “I want to use my title to give back and impact the lives of people in any small way I can. I want to take what I have learned and pass it on

“Trust followed when I met my social worker the next day, and she heard my story and the first thing she asked me was to share my dreams and goals.”

to vulnerable youth to advocate for themselves and take a step closer to their dreams.”

Reem decided to pursue a career in law, and she is currently working as a legal administrative assistant. She dreams of becoming a lawyer one day.

“Being here [at CHV], I would say that never in my life would I have imagined being able to speak about what I’ve been through and come out stronger and more at peace.

It’s easy to accept the tangible help that Covenant House provides — a roof over your head, food, and clothes to wear. But I feel what changed my life was the support, the unconditional love, and the non-judgmental environment. And I can’t highlight this enough that the counselling

sessions helped me advocate for myself and turned me into the woman that I am today.

One thing that I told Covenant House as I was parting with them was, ‘When you’re helping women, you’re not only saving a life, you’re saving a whole line of generations to come who will make a difference in the world.’”

“I want to use my title to give back and impact the lives of people in any small way I can. I want to take what I have learned and pass it on to vulnerable youth to advocate for themselves and take a step closer to their dreams.”

DID YOU KNOW? Drop-In services have seen a remarkable surge in engagement, with 60 – 70 youth attending daily this year, compared to 40 last year.

“Being here [at CHV], I would say that never in my life would I have imagined being able to speak about what I’ve been through and come out stronger and more at peace.”

REEM

COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER ALUMNA

What Are Low-Barrier Services and Why Are They Important?

A CONVERSATION WITH JON SPILLER

Community Support Services (CSS), which includes the Drop-In Centre and our Outreach team, provides comprehensive and complex services that are directly informed by the community we work with. CSS is often the first point of contact between CHV and youth.

Jon Spiller, CHV's Manager of Complex Support Services, has overseen some critical changes that include the expansion of services to seven days a week.



INTERVIEWER: Jon, what does low-barrier mean and why are CSS services so important?

JON: Low-barrier basically means removing any obstacle that's stopping a youth from accessing our services. To come into the Drop-In Centre, the requirements are minimal — you just need to be within our age range of 16 –24. You don't need to have a job, be in school, or have an income.

The CSS team is passionate about removing the barriers that might prevent youth from accessing our services. We meet weekly to discuss the youth we're seeing, and the team comes up with incredible ideas to solve challenges like, "This youth is struggling in our space at the moment. How can we make our space more supportive?"

These are some of the most vulnerable youth out there, and there are very few youth-specific drop-in programs in Vancouver. It's important that youth have a space to come and feel safe.

I: Youth in CSS may have different challenges and traumas. Could you speak about some of the obstacles that young people face?

J: A lot of the youth are persistently unhoused and many have had negative experiences accessing support. It's important for us to break down those barriers and regain trust.

They may not have any safe place to stay, which puts them at risk of being targeted for exploitation. Youth experiencing homelessness are quite often isolated, which means they have limited support networks.

Youth are struggling with their mental health, and we know that has an impact on their lives. There's also the toxic drug supply; that's a massive challenge.

We also see youth who are struggling financially or youth who drop in sporadically for a little bit of extra support. There are youth who have housing but want to come and do their laundry, or just want to connect

with people because they feel isolated. We're also seeing a really big increase in refugees and newcomers to Canada.

Youth struggle to get access to resources. The stigma makes it even harder for them to reach out for the services they need, and that gets in the way of offering youth the best support. Ultimately, it puts people's lives at risk.

I: Could you describe the Drop-In Centre and the kind of services and supports that young people coming in typically need?

J: Our Drop-In is now open seven days per week and provides youth with showers, clothing, laundry, and food. We provide healthy meals and access to computers, and youth can play games, watch TV, and sleep. Youth use Drop-In during the day to stay safe. It's a space where they can just come and recharge.

I: What's the thing that you most enjoy about your job?

J: The youth and the staff. You meet some incredible characters and it's really nice to be a part of their journeys, however big or small that part is.

When the temperatures dropped, we said, as a team, that we wanted to be

able to stay open longer because there will be youth who are massively at risk — these are life-threatening temperatures. Before I knew it, the team had everything sorted — they moved everything around, changed their schedules, and stayed overnight to support the youth. And they do it because they care.

“You meet some incredible characters and it's really nice to be a part of their journeys, however big or small that part is.”

JON SPILLER

MANAGER, COMPLEX SUPPORT SERVICES



LISTEN TO OUR PODCAST!
Scan the QR code to hear more from our conversation with Jon.

The following composite stories illustrate common life experiences and barriers that youth face every day, while protecting the identities of individual youth currently utilizing CHV services.

Kaya

Kaya is a tenacious, artistic, and compassionate 20-year-old Indigenous youth.

Kaya was faced with homelessness upon aging out of foster care, and her life has been shaped by the trauma of parents who grappled with the enduring effects of residential schools and colonialism. Diagnosed with ADHD in childhood, Kaya never received necessary treatment and began using substances at age 13. Kaya currently sleeps on the beach because she finds shelters unwelcoming and scary, and they often place restrictions on her loyal companion — her dog.

A CHV Outreach worker encounters Kaya on a rainy day, offers her an umbrella and a sandwich, and informs her about the Drop-In Centre's open-door policy.

How does CHV remove barriers so that Kaya can receive services?

1. ACCOMMODATING SPACES: Recognizing Kaya's sensitivity to overstimulation due to ADHD, Drop-In offers a quiet room for her to rest, away from noise. Additionally, a designated pet room allows Kaya to safely leave her dog while using the Drop-In Centre.



2. BUILDING TRUST THROUGH FAMILIARITY: After a few encounters with a youth worker in Drop-In, Kaya mentions that she wishes to reconnect with her Indigenous roots. The youth worker offers to go with Kaya to an Indigenous community event to introduce her to other Indigenous youth. Kaya appreciates the company of the youth worker because she gets nervous in new situations.



3. FLEXIBLE CASE PLANNING: Kaya expresses interest in meeting with a social worker to set and work towards her goals. Due to Kaya's struggle to attend scheduled appointments, the CHV team creates a plan to notify the social worker when Kaya comes in so that they can have impromptu meetings.



4. HOUSING SUPPORT: Alongside a housing support worker, Kaya uses the computers in Drop-In to apply for rent subsidies and pet-friendly housing, eventually securing a room in a house with other neurodivergent youth.



5. SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORT: Now that Kaya has a safe space to live, she expresses interest in addressing her substance use. Kaya meets virtually with a clinical counsellor to discuss ways to get her substance use to a more manageable level. Kaya receives harm-reduction supplies from Drop-In so that she can remain safe.



With compassionate outreach and tailored services designed to break down barriers, Kaya gradually works on stability and healing. The efforts focus on dignity, trust-building, and flexibility to ensure that Kaya feels valued and empowered on her journey to self-sufficiency.

Amir

Amir fled his home country, where the penalty for being gay is death or jail, in search of safety and acceptance in Canada.

Upon his arrival, Amir encountered an exploitative situation; he was lured by a man who promised cash-in-hand work, only to have his passport seized before being forced to endure unpaid labour. Despite these hardships, Amir's journey remains characterized by resilience and an unwavering commitment to living authentically.

In a moment of desperation, Amir calls 211 after spotting the number on a bus ad. The helpline guides Amir to the CHV Drop-In, conveniently located just a five-minute walk from the hostel where he currently resides. There are multiple barriers that Amir has encountered since moving to Canada, including cultural and language differences; legal and immigration challenges; social isolation; discrimination and stigma; a lack of awareness of legal rights, community resources, and the Canadian healthcare system; and housing insecurity.

How does CHV remove barriers for Amir?



1. SAFE SPACE AND ACCEPTANCE: CHV provides a judgment-free space where Amir is accepted for his sexual orientation and offered a supportive environment to rebuild his life. The first thing Amir notices at CHV is the 2SLGBTQAI+ flag proudly displayed outside.



2. CULTURAL SENSITIVITY: Recognizing Amir's desire to stay connected with his culture, the Spiritual Care Practitioner at CHV provides him with a prayer rug and invites him to an upcoming cultural event to foster a sense of social inclusion. Additionally, Amir's social worker secures a scholarship for Amir to take English lessons to address his aspiration to improve his language skills for future job opportunities.



3. COMMUNITY INTEGRATION: CHV introduces Amir to local 2SLGBTQAI+ support networks to help him build new relationships and combat isolation. Amir attends his first ever 2SLGBTQAI+ event at the Drop-In and meets somebody who speaks his native language, which creates an immediate connection. The next day, his new friend tells Amir about the free health clinic at CHV that he can access while waiting for Canadian healthcare.



4. LEGAL AID AND ASYLUM SUPPORT: Amir's social worker collaborates with legal aid services to guide him through the asylum process with comprehensive support and information.



5. EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT: A youth worker aids Amir in discovering employment prospects, building his financial independence and integration into Canadian society. Recognizing indicators of labour trafficking, staff offer support and educational resources to raise awareness about the risks associated with human trafficking.



Through this tailored spectrum of services, Amir is afforded the space to heal and find stability. He is supported by a community as he finds employment and waits to hear the results of his application for asylee status. Thanks to the support from CHV, Amir is on track to secure full-time employment as a Canadian citizen, fully integrating into our community.

CHV Programs & Services Expanding to Meet the Growing Demand

In recent months, the demand for CHV's resources has increased significantly, which has underscored the critical importance of our low-barrier programs and services. The number of young people visiting the Drop-In Centre each day has surged, which emphasizes the pressing need for expanded and accessible support.

OUTREACH: NURTURING TRUST BEYOND WALLS

Our Outreach teams play a pivotal role in the community and work to become familiar faces for youth who are living on the streets. Outreach is the initial point of contact to CHV's services for many young people, and Outreach workers build trusting relationships with youth by offering them food and medical assistance. Through their interactions with the Outreach team, youth begin to trust our staff, feel safe receiving support, and gradually access the spectrum of services available at CHV.

DROP-IN CENTRE EXPANSION: SEVEN DAYS A WEEK

Our Drop-In Centre has expanded its operations from five days a week to seven to provide a safe place for young people to access services over the weekend. Previously, youth faced challenges with access to essential community resources and support on Saturdays and Sundays. This expansion ensures that our doors are open every day to provide a continuous source of support for young people in need.



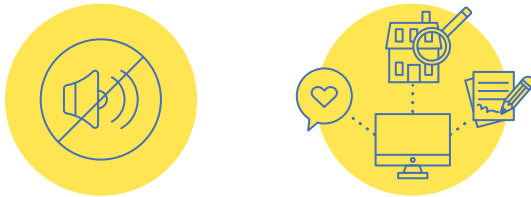
This service expansion also allow youth to address their physical well-being. Access to washrooms, laundry facilities, and hygiene resources are a basic right and a source of dignity that every individual deserves. For youth who live on the street, the Drop-In Centre is a sanctuary — a place to rest, recover, and find respite.

COMPREHENSIVE DROP-IN SUPPORTS

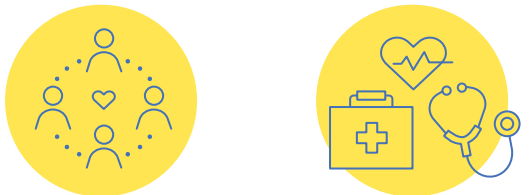
Our Drop-In Centre offers a comprehensive array of supports, each a crucial component in the journey towards stability and well-being.



From Covey's Cupboard, our free grocery pantry, to showers, washrooms, and laundry facilities, the Drop-In Centre provides basic necessities that are often taken for granted.



The quiet room provides youth with a space to relax, while computers are used to communicate with loved ones, search for housing, or work on a resume.



One-on-one support from our dedicated staff and counsellors ensures personalized attention, while primary care and physical health services address the holistic well-being of youth.

Recognizing the pressing reality of the ongoing toxic drug supply crisis, we make sure that our Drop-In Centre is stocked with crucial harm reduction tools like naloxone, a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids. It's a testament to our deep commitment to keeping our community safe and healthy, and for young people, knowing this kind of support is available could make the difference between life and death. A young person may find the courage to reach out for help with their substance use, and when that happens, our staff are there to listen and guide youth towards our new Foundations program — a warm and welcoming seven-bed program tailored to young folks who want to address their substance use in a supportive environment.

As we expand our low-barrier programs and services, we are building healthy communities of support where youth can feel like they belong.

As we expand our low-barrier programs and services, we are building healthy communities of support where youth can feel like they belong. Our Outreach teams continue to be friendly faces in the community, while the extended hours at the Drop-In Centre ensure that no day is a missed opportunity for support.

DID YOU KNOW? In 2016, BC's Provincial Health Officer declared a public health emergency due to opioid-related deaths, which have risen steadily each year.



Remembering Rosalie Segal

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Rosalie was born in a modest home to two hardworking parents. Although she did not grow up in an affluent family, she cared about people and tried to help them in any way she could.

Rosalie married the man of her dreams, Joe Segal, at the age of 17. Together, they created a family filled with love. Rosalie and Joe had four children, 11 grandchildren, and 18 great grandchildren, and their house in Vancouver became more than just a home; it transformed into the "Segal Centre," a hub of warmth and love where friends and family were always welcome.

Rosalie's compassion knew no bounds. Whenever she read about someone in need in the newspaper, she felt compelled to help. Her mantra was simple yet profound: "I give to everyone, so I don't miss the one who really needs it."

Rosalie was always eager to open her heart to the community when she became aware of a cause that could benefit from her support. During a university dinner, Rosalie learned that there were students attending the university who had special needs. Driven by her unwavering desire to make a difference, she set up the Rosalie Segal Endowment for Students with Special Needs, which has impacted the lives of over 300 students. It was just one of the many ways that she sought to leave a lasting impact on the world.

Her interest in mental health grew during a vacation with Joe, where they encountered vulnerable individuals in a park and offered their help. This experience prompted them to learn more from a family member, who was a psychiatrist, about the ways mental illness can affect a person, and the community's need for mental health support.

Her mantra was simple yet profound: "I give to everyone, so I don't miss the one who really needs it."

Covenant House Vancouver and the issue of youth homelessness grew close to Rosalie's heart. She was inspired by CHV's support of basic needs like food and shelter, as well as programs that help youth overcome trauma, learn vital life skills, and pursue their passions. Rosalie dedicated a generous gift towards mental health initiatives at CHV because she knew that addressing mental health early in life could prevent long-term struggles, contribute to positive life outcomes, and help break the cycle of homelessness.

Rosalie's love for the mini calendars from CHV was a delightful constant in her life. They were the perfect size to be displayed in many rooms in the Segal home and she loved the stunning images. She would also share these calendars with friends and family.

Rosalie emphasized the importance of addressing less visible causes, those that didn't receive as much attention or recognition.

spouses, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Although Rosalie never asked for thanks or recognition for her charitable work, she left behind a legacy of generosity and kindness, ensuring that the world will forever remember the extraordinary woman who made it a brighter place.

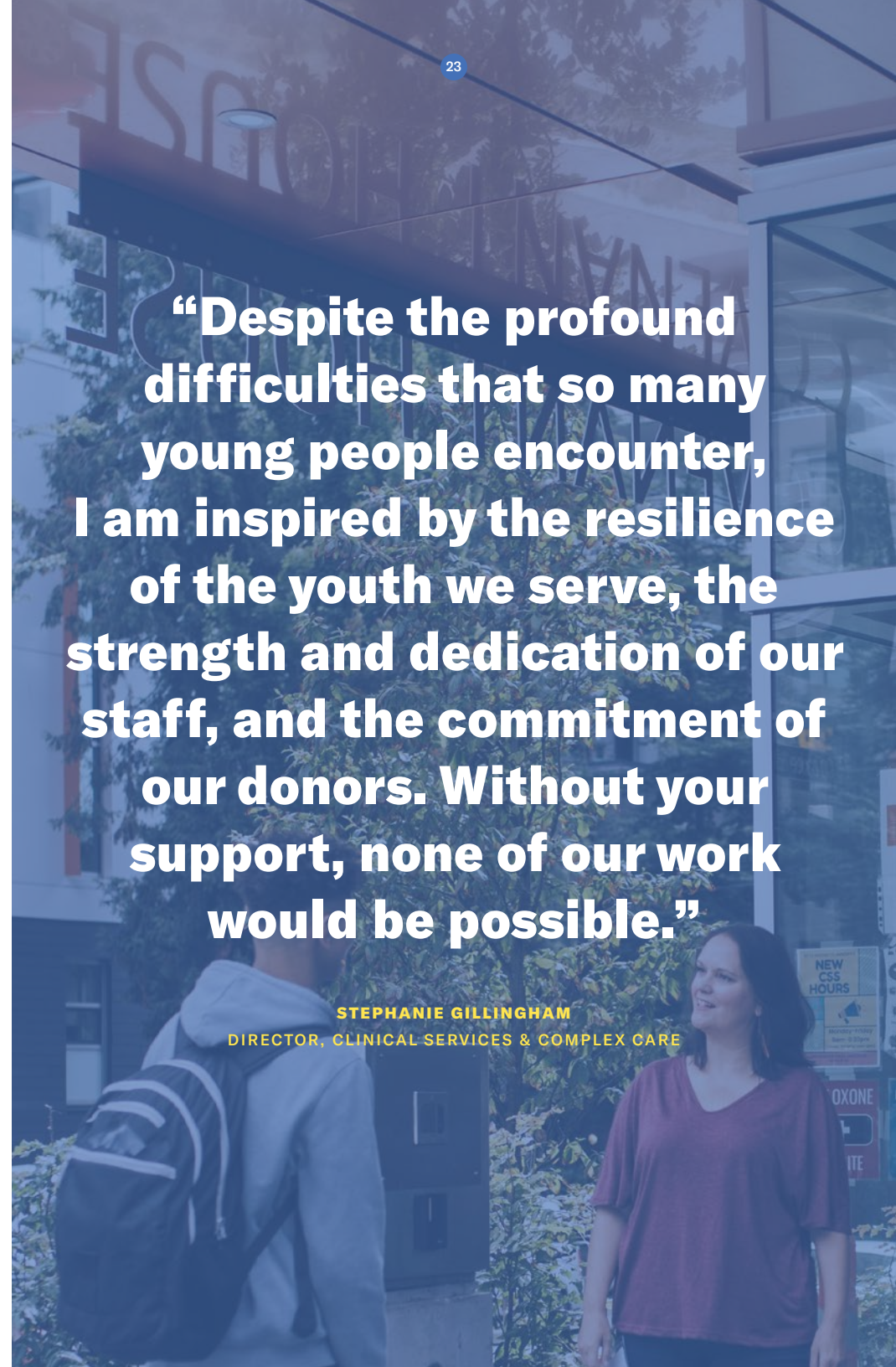
Rosalie's advocacy for youth is truly inspirational and we are honoured that she chose to support Covenant House Vancouver. Thank you, Rosalie.

Rosalie emphasized the importance of addressing less visible causes, those that didn't receive as much attention or recognition. She would say, "I am glad I can do it." Her greatest pride was her family, and her caring spirit lives on in her children, their

DID YOU KNOW? Last year, 82% of young people participating in case management services at CHV improved or maintained their capacity to manage their substance use.

“Despite the profound difficulties that so many young people encounter, I am inspired by the resilience of the youth we serve, the strength and dedication of our staff, and the commitment of our donors. Without your support, none of our work would be possible.”

STEPHANIE GILLINGHAM
DIRECTOR, CLINICAL SERVICES & COMPLEX CARE





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