

Belonging

How your support impacts youth.



Covenant
House
Vancouver

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Inside cover artwork created by a youth in our Rights of Passage (ROP) program

To our Covenant House Vancouver Family,

Hope. It can be defined as a feeling of trust, a belief that the future will be bright, or something that keeps you going during the most challenging times.

The opioid crisis, the pandemic, and social reckoning have added another layer to the trauma young people experiencing homelessness have already suffered. But despite the adverse times we have collectively faced, you have continued to stand beside us and help provide youth with a future to look forward to.

As we navigate this new normal and the uncertainties that lie ahead, we know that we can count on you as we invest in the lives of vulnerable young people. By providing wrap-around programs and services that meet their complex needs, we can move towards changing the trajectory of homelessness and building a future that is bright.

None of which would be possible without you.

I hope you enjoy the inaugural issue of our newsletter *Belonging*, which will demonstrate the impact of your generosity through stories about our youth, staff, programs, and more.

From all of us at Covenant House Vancouver (CHV), thank you for your investment, your care, and, most of all, for providing our young people with hope.

With gratitude,

Tracy Brown



TRACY BROWN,
DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT



GABRIEL UNDERSTANDS BELONGING FOR THE FIRST TIME



Many of the youth that come to Covenant House have faced some form of trauma and can be unfamiliar with relationships built on trust and unconditional support. Over time, these relationships with our frontline staff create a sense of belonging and are often part of the reason youth want to work towards a brighter future.

A great example is Gabriel*, who has accessed Covenant House's programs for the past two years. Gabriel moved to BC from the Middle East and was staying in the Crisis Program when he lost his passport.

Gabriel and his youth worker made multiple trips to the embassy, always stopping to get a coffee and go for a walk near the water. It was during these trips that Gabriel started to form a relationship with his youth worker, opening up about his past trauma and struggle with substance use.

Over the next year, Gabriel was in and out of the [Crisis Program](#), but his youth worker always stayed connected with him, whether it was on the streets through [Outreach or at the Drop-In Centre](#). When Gabriel took the step to transition into a youth treatment program, his youth worker continued to visit him weekly.

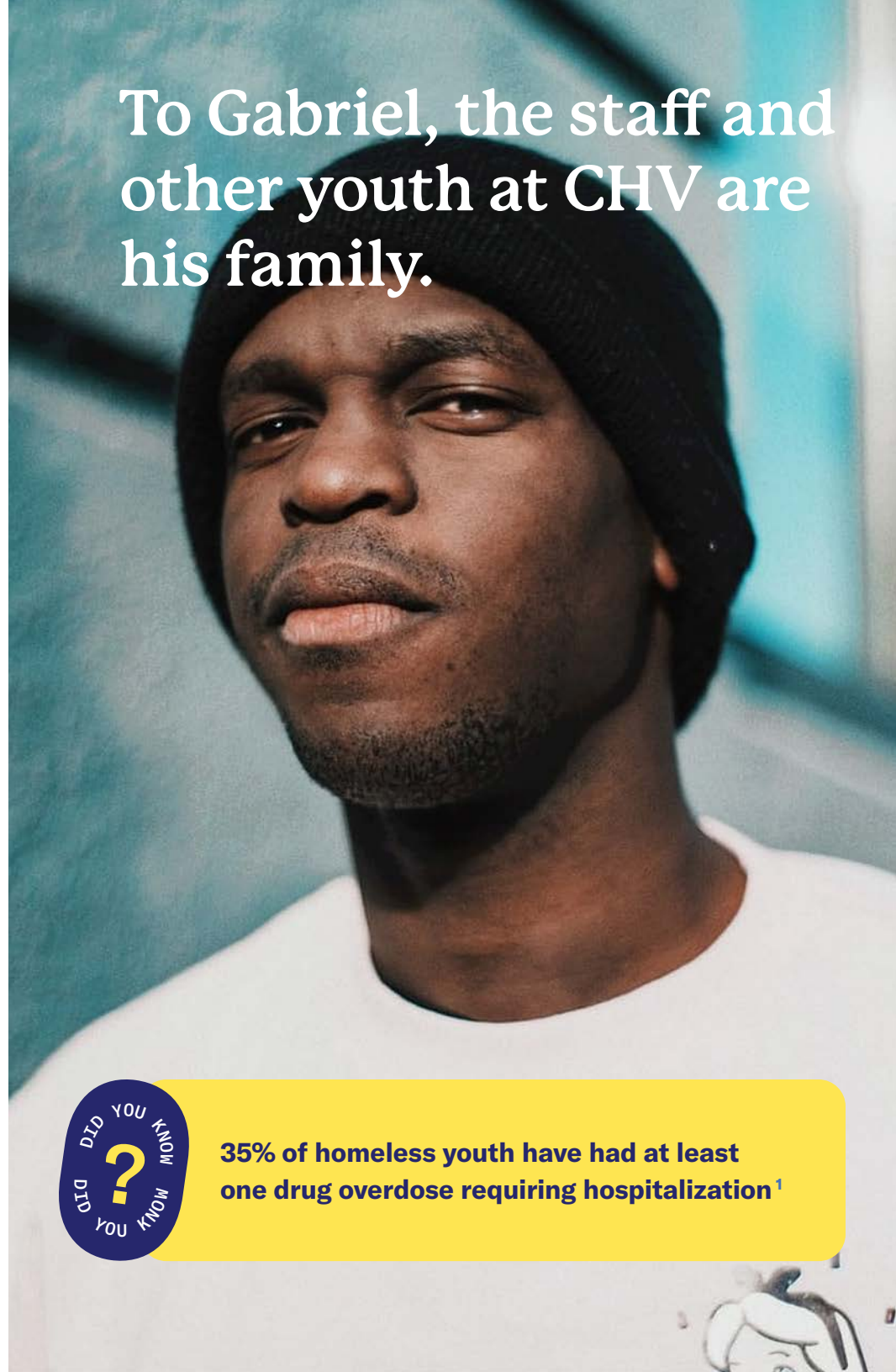
Gabriel was in the process of applying for his refugee status. Because he was unable to work, he would use his free time to work towards this goal. His youth worker would take Gabriel and other youth on hikes, and encouraged Gabriel to continue accessing the Drop-In Centre to help him move away from using substances and toward recreational activities and a sense of community.

Gabriel is now living in supportive mental health housing and has achieved his refugee status. He still connects with his youth worker when he needs help. To Gabriel, the staff and other youth at CHV are his family. While Gabriel still occasionally struggles with substance use, he is motivated to start the process of applying for his work visa and to achieve his long term goal of sobriety.

**Gabriel's name has been changed to protect privacy.*

¹ Reference: https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/YouthMentalHealth_Policy_Brief.pdf page 4

To Gabriel, the staff and other youth at CHV are his family.



35% of homeless youth have had at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization¹

WHY WE PRACTICE TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

Many of the factors that lead youth to our doors can be traced back to childhood experiences of trauma. Trauma can have a significant effect on the development of a young person's brain and sensory system – which is why CHV practices [Trauma Informed Care](#) when supporting youth in crisis.

What is trauma?

Trauma results from an event or series of events that are physically or emotionally harmful to an individual. Common forms of trauma include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as life-threatening experiences.

How does trauma affect youth?

When experienced over time without safe and protective relationships as a buffer, trauma affects everything from an individual's decision-making abilities, to their impulse control, to their ability to follow through with a plan.

Triggers + re-traumatization

When triggered, the trauma response can look like erratic and even violent or dangerous behavior to an unknowing onlooker. When we are unaware of the trauma others have experienced, we're more likely to misunderstand their behaviour, trigger their trauma responses, and potentially re-traumatize them.

How can we help? Trauma Informed Care

Trauma Informed Care is an approach to working with marginalized communities that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety.

Rather than act as a separate program, Trauma Informed Care is woven into all of our programs – indeed, into everything we do – at Covenant House.

In practical terms, this looks like:

1 Specialized Staff Training

All staff receive training related to Trauma Informed Care, and program staff participate in specialized training to ensure they have the knowledge to create a welcoming space for all youth.

2 Attachment Model of Care

Youth at Covenant House work with the same social workers and specialists for the duration of their time with us – including if they choose to leave our programs and return in the future. This way youth don't have to revisit their traumatic experiences by explaining their background multiple times to different people.

3 Enhanced Mental Health Services

Youth at Covenant House Vancouver have access to supports for their mental health that help them heal from their trauma, and are typically not accessible to underserved populations, such as free clinical counseling and timely psychiatric care.



85% of homeless youth have experienced a mental health crisis²

² Reference: https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/YouthMentalHealth_Policy_Brief.pdf page 4

“ By supporting organizations we trust, we can support the communities that need our attention the most.”



↑ From left to right: Hamid Eshghi, President | Margaret Thomson, Director and Treasurer | Mr. Mowafaghian, Founder | Mr. Tahsili, ex Board member | Vahid Eshghi, Vice President



DONOR SPOTLIGHT: DJAVAD MOWAFAGHIAN FOUNDATION

Creating real change through partnership

Day-to-day operations of the [Djavad Mowafaghian Foundation](#) may no longer be run by its founder, humanitarian and business leader Mr. Mowafaghian, but its small board channels his spirit with every decision they make.

“Mr. Mowafaghian is an incredibly kind and considerate man,” explains Margaret Thomson, treasurer and director of the foundation.

“His father passed away when he was very young and he was raised by a single mother in a modest household in Tehran. His mother was generous to those in need in their community, and he attributes his passion for giving to her.”

Formed in 2003, the foundation really took shape in 2010, when Mr. Mowafaghian suffered a stroke and switched his focus almost entirely to giving back. In the eleven years since, they have supported their mandate with enthusiasm, and the presidency of the foundation has shifted to Mr. Mowafaghian’s nephew, Hamid Eshghi.

The board, however, continues to employ Mr. Mowafaghian’s careful approach to philanthropy.

“We believe the biggest changes come from long-lasting partnerships,” says Thomson, “so we really take our time when choosing who we support. A one-time gift for something like a building can have a lot of impact, but it doesn’t always carry through. When we trust an organization is making a difference and a good steward of funds, we’re going to continue to support them.”

The board – who recognize the far-reaching effects of homelessness in Vancouver – has turned their attention to organizations like Covenant House Vancouver, Coast Mental Health, and the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre in recent years.

“Giving is such a personal thing, and, for us, no one wants to see a young person living on the streets. The abuse and trauma that some of these young people experience is a travesty. By supporting organizations we trust, we can support the communities that need our attention the most.”

THE SPECIAL BOND BETWEEN YOUTH WORKER AND YOUTH



The relationship between a youth and their youth worker is an important one that helps shape and structure a youth's time at Covenant House Vancouver (CHV).

The example below of a youth named Mary and her youth worker, Agnes, is a composite of many real-life experiences shared by youth and youth workers at CHV.

Mary Enters the Female-Identified Crisis Program

Having just come out of an experience of homelessness, Mary is exhausted and overwhelmed. Agnes introduces herself, and helps Mary get her bearings.

Creating Stability

Agnes helps Mary get her Provincial ID, obtain full-time work at a grocery store, and connect with a counsellor to manage her mental health. She also encourages her to connect with other residents, and provides her with a sense of consistency.

Setting & Achieving Bigger Goals

Mary speaks to Agnes about wanting more independence. Together, Mary and Agnes create a budget and start to identify other life skills Mary can focus on to build her independence.

The Next Step: Rights of Passage

Agnes suggests the [Rights of Passage program \(ROP\)](#) at CHV to Mary, as it provides a good balance of structure and

independence. Mary schedules an info session with the intake worker at ROP. Afterwards Mary and Agnes complete the application, and Mary is accepted.

Managing a Difficult Transition

Mary and Agnes come up with a plan: after she moves in she continues to check in with Agnes and the ROP intake worker on a weekly basis, and both slowly introduce her to ROP staff.

Celebrating Mary's Success

Once she's adjusted to ROP, the intake worker sets up a meeting with Agnes, the life skills coordinator and Mary's new ROP youth worker. In this meeting Mary's strengths and accomplishments are celebrated, and together the team plans her next steps.

So Long but Not Goodbye

Mary starts working with her new youth worker on a more regular basis, but is welcome to check in with Agnes whenever she needs.



A sense of belonging is a human need, just like the need for food and shelter. Thank you for providing all of the above to our young people.



**Covenant
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