



**Covenant
House**
VANCOUVER

2018

**impact
report**



**551 youth
had contact
with our
Outreach staff**

**923 youth were
helped by
Community Support
Services**

(Street Outreach and Drop In Centre)

**474 stayed
in our Crisis
Program**

**1228 youth
received
our help**

**33 young people
participated in
our Rights of
Passage program**

dear
friends



...● It has been a year of excitement and energy at Covenant House Vancouver. Last fall we celebrated our 20th Anniversary of providing love and hope to young people — over 20,000 youth have passed through our doors since that day we opened in September 1997. Though the issues affecting them have changed, the young people still present to us as resilient, talented and optimistic that their future will be brighter than their past.

We have generated wonderful momentum within our Capital fundraising campaign and are thrilled to watch the steady progress of the Expansion Project and the construction of the Phase One building at 530 Drake Street. Opportunities for our donors to get involved in the project

financially will be shared in the near future.

Phase One is scheduled to be completed in March, 2019 and all of our programs and services currently operating out of 575 Drake Street will move across the street while another new building is constructed in its place. It is an exciting time for us knowing that once complete in 2020, these two new buildings and the programs that operate within them will expand our services for youth by 70%.



Financially, we are in excellent shape as we have been saving for the cost increases associated with our service expansion, combined with an extraordinary one-time \$2M gift from a donor who was new to Covenant House. This, along with exceptional stewardship of our resources, has allowed us to achieve our Board of Directors' mandate of having a "rainy day fund" that holds 3 months of operating revenue should an external financial or environmental emergency occur.

Our front-line staff continue to exhibit strength and courage working with our young people. Housing affordability and a doubling in the number of deaths from opioid overdose amongst our youth are having real consequences for our programs. Our team is hard at work addressing these issues to ensure that despite what challenges arise, our young people are welcomed warmly and that they always receive unconditional love and absolute respect.

As always, the strength of Covenant House is the solid foundation of you, our donors, who provide us with your



gifts of treasure and spirit. Just as our young people feel cared for and encouraged, our staff, volunteers and Board of Directors feel the tremendous support that you provide us year after year with such generosity.

Please accept my sincere thanks for your continued investment in the young people who turn to us for help. I know how grateful these youth are for your care, so on their behalf I thank you most sincerely.

KRISTA K. THOMPSON
Executive Director

feeling the impact

We've heard from our donors that they wish to hear about the issues that have impacted our service delivery — below are a few that we've faced during the past year:

affordable housing

- **The inability for our staff to find affordable housing in Metro Vancouver is taking a toll:**

Approximately 30% of employee turnover last year was directly attributed to staff leaving British Columbia to seek more affordable lifestyles and housing. We have learned from other youth-serving organizations that attracting and retaining staff is having a real impact on the sector's ability to ensure quality service provision in social programs in the Vancouver area.

We are committed to finding solutions; actively exploring new compensation models, alternative housing opportunities and priority access to housing units for staff as they become available.



opioid crisis

- **The Opioid Crisis is claiming the lives of our youth, their friends and family:**

Last year, approximately 24 young people associated with us have died tragically due to drug overdoses. Although these youth were no longer in our day-to-day care, many were still in regular contact with us. The impact on staff has been profound, with many suffering from "grief overload" as they struggle to cope with one loss after another.

We are actively exploring new supports for front-line staff including customized health benefits tailored to meet their specific needs.

LGBTQ2S+

- **25-40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ2S+ and family rejection is the most common cause of LGBTQ2S+ youth homelessness.**

LGBTQ2S+ youth are much more likely to struggle with mental health concerns, including suicidal thoughts.

Covenant House Vancouver and our sister sites throughout North and Central America are actively making our services more welcoming to all youth regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Locally, we are doing this in consultation with The Rainbow Advisory Committee which consists of staff throughout the agency.

continuum of care

Covenant House opened in 1997 in response to an overwhelming need for residential and support services for homeless and at-risk youth. We are primarily privately funded (95%), supported by 180 employees, 140 volunteers and over 50,000 donors.

We offer a full range of services through a carefully designed continuum of care or “one-stop-shop”. Our three core programs include:

street outreach and drop-in

The Outreach Team seeks out young people living on the streets, in SROs, or those at-risk of becoming homeless. The Outreach Team is the “face” of Covenant House, building trust with the youth, and encouraging them to access our programs where they can get something to eat, clothing, a friendly conversation or an outside referral. Housing workers and mental health clinicians are also available.



crisis program

Our 59-bed Crisis Program offers safe housing, food, clothing and counselling to young people aged 16 – 24. We take care of their immediate needs first, which are usually medical attention, food and rest. We encourage youth to create their own plan for independence and we support them every step of the way.



rights of passage (ROP)

ROP is a transitional living program for young people who need housing, structure and support as they strive toward independence. Basic life skills most of us take for granted: budgeting, cooking, cleaning and goal setting are taught.

We also provide emotional support and counselling. We are proud to report that 100% of youth in ROP transition off the street.

All our services are offered with genuine compassion and acceptance, with the knowledge that trust is the foundation for a successful transition away from street life.

the impact of our programs

Julie



Julie, 16, came to us trying to escape the clutches of her boyfriend who was 32 and very controlling. Highly vulnerable, Julie's cognitive abilities were like those of a nine-year-old — she had difficulty forming relationships and struggled with social cues.

When she arrived, she was thin, her clothes dirty, and her hair was tangled and matted.

Julie did not grasp when people were taking advantage of her, which is what brought her to Vancouver. Her boyfriend convinced her to leave her foster family, saying that foster parents

“don’t care about foster kids”. He promised a better life for her in Vancouver. Julie was teary-eyed when she said she hadn’t expected to be living on the streets. It was a story that Amber had heard many times before.

Amber worked closely with Julie, but it was challenging as her boyfriend still had a lot of control over her decision making. Julie was pressured by her boyfriend to leave us — he was making her feel guilty for not staying on the streets with him panhandling for money.

He tried to force Julie to have sex for money and she didn’t understand that this request was unacceptable. Amber explained that it is not safe for Julie to stay on the streets in the Downtown Eastside with someone who clearly did not have her best interests at heart.

Despite her boyfriend’s controlling influence, we built a trusting relationship with Julie — so much so that she decided to return home to her foster family. However, her boyfriend had her ID and she needed it back. She left to say good bye to him and get her ID back and that was the last time we saw her.

A few years passed since we had seen Julie. Recently, Amber was thinking about her when she received a call from the front desk worker saying that someone was here to see her. As Amber approached the lobby, she saw a lovely, well-groomed young woman, dressed very professionally. At first, she did not recognize Julie, but as soon as she started talking, Amber knew right away that it was her.

Julie apologized for taking so long to come and say hello. After spending quite some time on the streets, she finally found the strength to leave her boyfriend and return home to her foster family. She explained that while at Covenant House, we kept telling her that she had the potential to do wonderful things with her life and this is what made her want more for herself.

Julie had re-established a great relationship with her foster family, had returned to school, was about to graduate, and was working a part-time job. As she told her story to Amber, Julie was smiling from ear to ear — she was truly proud of herself and happy, as are we to hear how well she is doing.



Alex

Our Community Support Services (CSS) program offers young people two vital services: a daily drop in where food, companionship and referrals are available; and street outreach where youth workers connect with youth who are living on the streets, staying in SROs (Single Room Occupancy) hotels or in hospital etc. The staff at CSS accompany youth

to appointments, help them navigate the world and provide company to the most lonely youth we see.

Last fall, our CSS team were notified that a young woman from across the country was arriving by plane, fleeing sexual trafficking — the need for her to arrive safely to Covenant House was paramount. Two of our Outreach Workers, George and Lauren, were assigned to pick up the

young woman, Alex, at the airport. Alex spoke French so Lauren made a sign that read “bienvenue chez toi” which means “welcome to your home”.

Obviously, language was a bit of a barrier, so the staff used one phone to translate French to English and another one to translate English to French. Lauren and George managed to ask her what she knew about Vancouver. They talked about the mountains and other things and eventually brought up the ocean.

Alex’s eyes immediately lit up.

Lauren asked, “Have you ever been to the ocean?”

Alex said she hadn’t, but always wanted to.

Lauren and George knew exactly what they had to do. They said “If you’ve never seen the ocean, that’s absolutely the first thing we need to do. It’s the most important thing!” At the next intersection, they turned off for a detour to English Bay. All three of them got out and walked to the beach. Alex’s face was filled

with such joy — she was so happy.

Once near the water, Alex looked hesitantly and asked if she could dip her feet in the ocean. Lauren and George responded “Absolutely! You have to be grounded in this new place”.

Alex took her shoes off, dipped her feet in the water, and looked out on the horizon.

She walked around picking up shells on the beach and knew the variety of each one. With that one gesture of showing Alex the ocean, trust and friendship was established. They followed up the sea-side stop with a drive through Stanley Park to show off Vancouver’s beauty before heading back to Covenant House.

Lauren and George demonstrated that even the smallest of gestures can have a profound impact on a young person who has experienced so much trauma. Now Alex is safe from the horrors of sexual exploitation in a new and welcoming place.



Sam


We first met Sam three years ago when he showed up at the door of our Crisis Program (shelter). He had been living on the streets and had returned home the night before but wasn't allowed in the house. His mom allowed him to sleep in the backyard rather than turn him back to the streets and she dropped him off at Covenant House the next day. This may sound harsh, but Sam's mom had given him many chances in the past and she simply could not let him into the house.

Sam experienced a couple of significant traumas in his young life, and as a result suffered from depression and anxiety. He started using

marijuana when he was 12 and heroin at 14. Sam got mixed up with the wrong crowd in high school. Lying, stealing and dealing drugs became the norm for Sam as he joined a gang and lived the life of a criminal and addict. He had burned his bridges with his family and had nowhere to call home.

After his mom dropped him off, Sam settled into our Crisis Program and responded well to the structure we provide. While here, he said good-bye to his criminal past and committed to kicking his hard drug habit. Sam had left the gang and was ready to move forward with a new life. He refrained from using drugs, started exploring school options, secured a job in the restaurant industry and went to counselling.

Once Sam felt better and more optimistic about his future, he was ready to take the next step by moving into our transitional living program, Rights of Passage (ROP). While at ROP, Sam continued to excel: he got promotions at work, and through our Scholarship program was able to take



several university courses. He worked hard to rebuild his relationship with his family.

Working with the staff at ROP, Sam developed the life-skills that most of us take for granted: healthy eating, exercise and self-care. A role model for other youth in the program, Sam often helped his fellow residents with job searching and community building. He even participated in our Sleep Out events as a youth panelist, sharing his story with candor and bravery.

Not long ago, Sam moved out of ROP into his own apartment. He is continuing to advance his career in the food industry and is still working on his education. Finding his true love, Sam recently got married! We are so proud of Sam and his commitment to turn his life around and wish him continued success as he moves into the next stage of his life.

this year's highlights

- Served 1228 youth
- Opened five additional beds in the male Crisis Program
- Formally **accredited by Praesidium** (Child Protection Program)
- Hosted the **Human Trafficking roundtable** of Justice and Human Rights Committee of the Federal Government

- **Expanded our services for LGBTQ2S+** (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirited)
- Participated in the **BC Housing Leaders Forum**, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the American Bar Association Conference — Homeless Youth Legal Network

- Celebrated CHV's **20th Anniversary year** — 20,000 youth served!

- Over 30 employees from Telus helped renovate some of the common areas at our Pender Street building for their **"Telus Day of Caring"**
- Our **Sleep Out Events** (Executive Edition, Young Professionals, Student, and Mothers or Daughters) **raised over \$1,600,000**
- **16,464 volunteer hours** were donated
- **Coast Capital** supported us through a \$100,000 contribution for our June Match Campaign



The **Vancouver WhiteCaps FC** raised over \$80,000 during their BuckUp for Mental Health event

- Participated in the **Masquerade for Mental Health** at the Governor General of Canada's event

PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS IN THE DROP-IN CENTRE:

- **Food service** is at the heart of our programs as wholesome food facilitates relationship building and simultaneously meets a vital need for hungry youth in the community.

To enhance our food service, we worked with a dietician to ensure all meals are healthy and meet individual dietary needs and our breakfasts now include more protein to sustain homeless youth for longer.

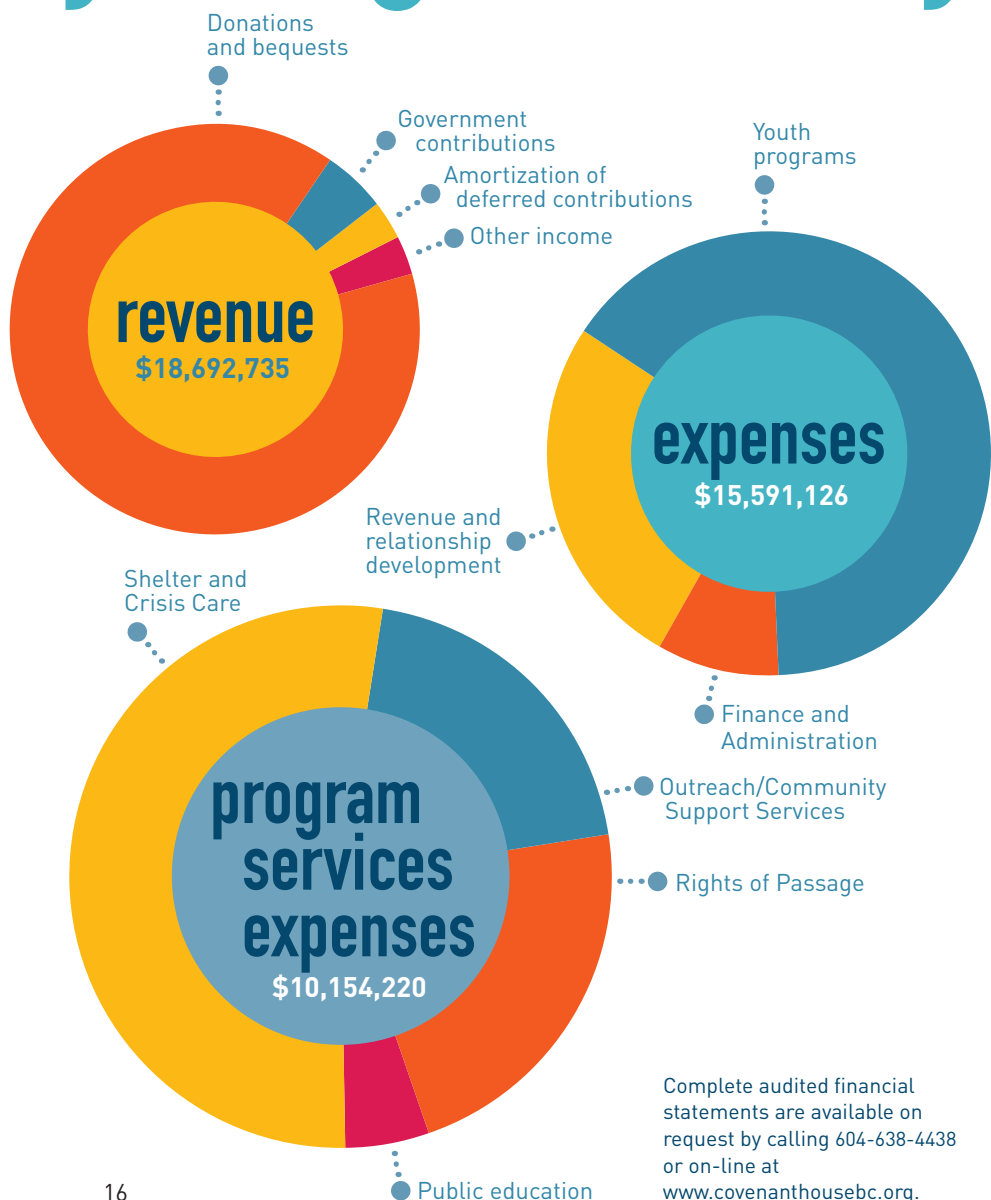
- An **Art Therapy Group** is running every Wednesday in the Drop-In Centre. One of our Mental Health Clinicians, Dr. Keith Thurlow-Bishop, recently received Alder

University's Community Partnership Award for his work with his art therapy students.

- There is now a **comfortable, monitored space in the Drop-In Centre where youth may have a nap**. Having a safe and relaxing environment to sleep in is a rare experience for homeless youth. Getting this vital rest has led to youth being less on-edge and more open to receiving further help.
- Thanks to a volunteer accountant, a **tax clinic** has been set up in the Drop-In Centre on Tuesday mornings. Youth must have their taxes up to date in order to qualify for income assistance, which is an important first step for many youth to have the means to turn their lives around.



the impact of your generosity



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