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2023 ISSUE**

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# Covenant House News



“Working with the youth has given me perspective about people and how their circumstances can really shape their experiences in life.”

**KRISTIN**  
VOLUNTEER, CHV

[READ THE FULL STORY ON PAGE 9 →](#)



## Until June 30th, every gift you make will be doubled!

Our Spring Match is made possible by the generous support of Vancouver International Airport (YVR), who are matching every dollar donated, up to \$100,000. With this matching gift from YVR, your gift will go even further in helping to create a better future for youth in need.

Tamara Vrooman, President and CEO at YVR, shares why they were so inspired to help young people experiencing homelessness in our community:

important and impactful work they are doing to provide hundreds of youth with wrap-around support, and welcoming them to a safe, inclusive, hopeful, and comforting environment.”

**“We are deeply invested in our people and community.”**

**TAMARA VROOMAN**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, YVR

“YVR is proud to expand our long-standing partnership with Covenant House and double the impact by matching all donations. We are deeply invested in our people and community. Through this partnership, we are pleased to support Covenant House in the

Please know that even a small amount will make a big difference, as your donation will go twice as far in helping young people in our community.

**Donate today: [covenanthousebc.org](https://covenanthousebc.org)**



**MELISSA, COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES**

## A youth worker helps a young person find a connection to her mom

When I first started working in Community Support Services, which includes our Drop-In Centre and Outreach programs, I noticed that there was a quiet, young woman who usually keeps to herself when she regularly visits the Drop-In Centre. I introduced myself

to her and she told me that her name was Melissa.

Over the span of several months, I slowly got to know Melissa by doing activities with her like colouring, puzzles, playing games, and just having casual conversations. One day, Melissa opened

up to me about her mom. She told me what her mom was like, and that she had passed away a few years ago. Melissa told me that she had no photos of her mom to remember her by and I could tell that this bothered her a lot.

A few weeks later, Melissa mentioned to me that her mom had been part of a project in the Downtown Eastside called *Hope in Shadows*. This is a photography contest that began in 2003, hosted by *Megaphone* magazine. *Hope in Shadows* is an opportunity for residents of the Downtown Eastside to show the rest of Vancouver how they would like people to

**“... we must honour the life stories of our youth and their connections to their family members — whether it be their birth or chosen families.”**

see the Downtown Eastside. Participants are given single-use cameras to capture images of their communities, for a chance to be featured in the annual *Hope in Shadows* calendar.

The name of this project sounded very familiar to me, and I realized that years ago I had obtained a copy of the *Hope in Shadows* calendar. Later that day, I went home and looked through my bookcase. Sure enough, I found the

*Hope in Shadows* calendar and rapidly started flipping through it, looking for a matching last name, or the first name of Melissa’s mom.

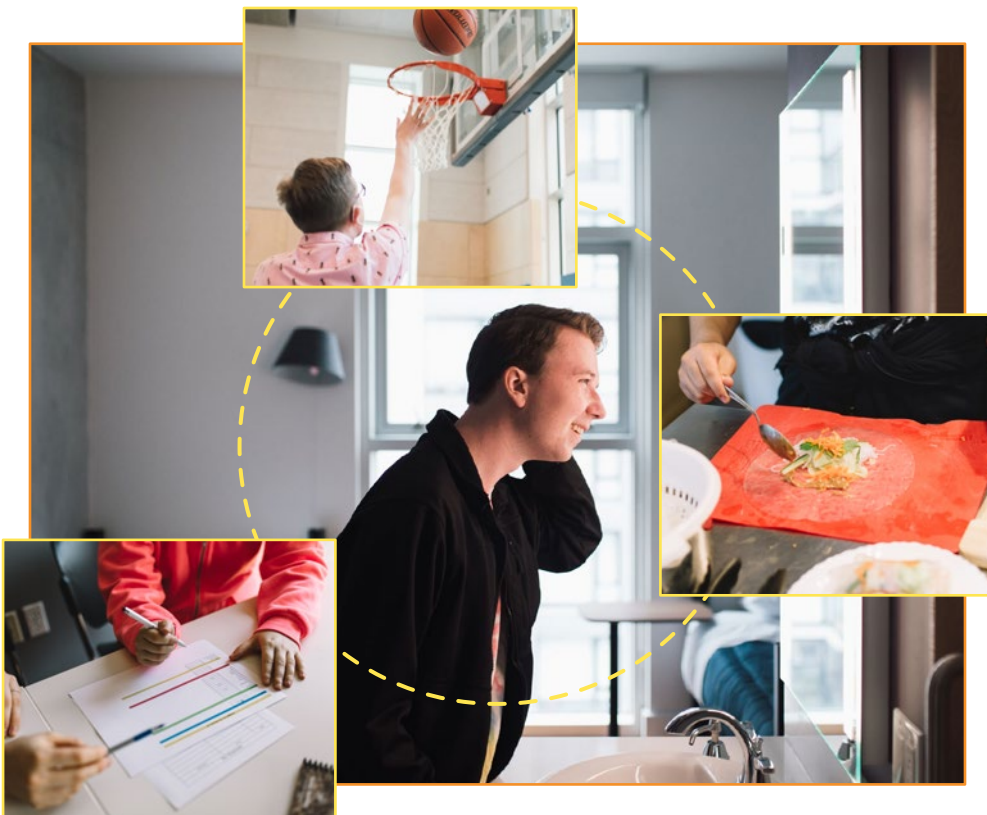
Midway through the calendar, I stopped and saw her, a smiling black and white portrait of Melissa’s mom — who looked just like Melissa. I was thrilled that I had the correct edition of the calendar. There were two other photos of Melissa’s mom that also featured other members of Melissa’s family.

I immediately scanned and printed copies of the photos from the calendar to take them to the Drop-In Centre the next day. I noticed Melissa in the Drop-In space that day and told her that I had found the calendar, and inside of it were photos of her mom. I asked Melissa if she would like to have the photos. She said yes, and I turned them over to her.

Melissa’s expression changed and I could see how meaningful it was to her to be given those photos of her mom, who was smiling and happy. Melissa thanked me and smiled while clutching her photos.

As youth workers, we must honour the life stories of our youth and their connections to their family members — whether it be their birth or chosen families. Helping Melissa preserve her memories of her mom was such a joyful experience and I was honoured that I could support her in this special way.

*Story shared by a youth worker. Young person’s name changed for confidentiality.*



## Life skills are at the heart of ROP

When we are asked, “What is the Rights of Passage (ROP) program all about?” The simplest way to explain it is that ROP is about building life skills for each youth, so that they can make a successful transition to living independently.

The life skills that one youth may need to be successful can be quite different than another’s. That’s why, at Covenant House Vancouver, we take a one-size-fits-one approach and tailor a plan for each youth that will help them to succeed.

Many youth come to Covenant House with survival skills that they have developed for life on the street. When they arrive at ROP, we sit down with them to assess if the skills that got them here are now going to serve them well in the future.

There are many fundamental skills that the average person takes for granted. But, for youth who lack support and nurturing adults, these skills never get taught to them. The range of skills that

the ROP program provides for youth can range from learning how to tie your shoes and realizing that in the grocery store, hamburger meat is called ground beef, to how to be competent at cooking and learning the importance of self-care. It truly is a one-size-fits-one approach.

Included in the fundamental life skills that ROP teaches are extremely valuable life skills like how to rent without getting scammed. The Rent Smart program teaches youth their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the landlord, so that once youth secure housing, they can maintain that stability.

Another important life skill is cooking. The Pender building renovation will provide us with a training kitchen, where we will be able to immerse youth in training that will give them the confidence they need to cook for themselves, and to be able to entertain guests.

ROP provides youth with much more flexibility and freedom than the Crisis Program, because we want youth to build the confidence needed to successfully transition to independence. Youth are responsible for making their own breakfasts and lunches, but there is a set time for dinner that is provided for them. Of course, there are exceptions to accommodate situations, such as school and work. There is also an activity board where youth are notified about outings and activities that they can participate in.

Despite the challenge of housing costs and availability, youth continue to graduate from ROP to independence. We had a youth who came to the Crisis Program, from Northern Canada. She really struggled with the structure of that program. She then moved to the ROP program where, given the space to be

**“Not only was she able to transition to independence, but she was able to budget enough money to support family back home.”**

more independent, she thrived. She learned budgeting skills that were very important to her. Recently, she graduated from ROP into a home, where she rents a room that is near her employment. Not only was she able to transition to independence, but she was able to budget enough money to support family back home.

We are very proud of the youth who are in the ROP program. Although it can feel daunting to be able to achieve the life that you deserve, the youth in the ROP program show amazing resilience, and commitment. These success stories are only possible because of the amazing support that we receive from donors, like you. We are very grateful for your support.



## This year, in ROP



**25**  
YOUTH WERE  
HOUSED



**24%**  
OF YOUTH CAME FROM  
GOVERNMENT CARE



**100%**  
OF DISCHARGES  
WERE PLANNED



**91%**  
OF YOUTH IMPROVED OR  
MAINTAINED THEIR HOUSING



**20**  
MONTHS WAS THE AVERAGE  
LENGTH OF STAY

## Are you looking for a way to leave a legacy to youth in our community, while reducing your taxes?

Please consider a gift in your Will to Covenant House Vancouver.

A gift in your Will empowers you to make a lasting impact on the world, by providing for your loved ones and the causes that matter most to you. Through your Will, you can continue to walk alongside the young people who turn to Covenant House for support, on their journey away from life on the streets and towards a brighter future.

### For more information please contact:

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or visit our website at [covenanthousebc.org](http://covenanthousebc.org) for information on how to give.



### EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

## Meet the lovely, and unique, Lesley

Lesley has been at CHV since the very beginning, but before finding her way here, she had quite the journey of her own. When Lesley was two, her family decided to move from England to Richmond, BC. The family eventually ended up residing in Ladner. Her father was an engineer, and he built the house that they lived in for many years. Lesley's upbringing was full of laughs, life lessons, and some trouble making.

As Lesley got older, she decided to take marketing at BCIT, along with one of her girlfriends (despite having no idea what marketing was). Eventually, she discovered tourism and specialized in it. "I worked for a tour operator in Sales

and Marketing, costing out tour packages for people travelling to Canada. What was nice was that I got to travel around the world. I met new people and learned about different cultures, while working." After only a few interactions with clients, Lesley started to think that maybe tourism wasn't for her.

Soon after, Lesley started volunteering at The Door is Open — a drop-in shelter, in downtown Vancouver. After finding out her mother was ill, Lesley decided to leave her job to care for her mother, who sadly ended up passing away. This was an incredibly turbulent time in Lesley's life, as she was then faced with the question that many people ask

themselves, “What am I going to do?” It was important for Lesley to enjoy her work, whatever that may be.

Lesley was referred to Jim Edwards, who was coming from Toronto to start a Covenant House in Vancouver and needed volunteers. Despite not knowing what Covenant House was, Lesley felt compelled to learn more. All it took was Jim showing her a short video and the rest was history. “Jim was amazing! I was his assistant for a bit, but I then got my credentials to start youth work. The assistant work wasn’t my calling, as I really cared about youth. I remember

I’m sure that you can tell by now that youth work is a true passion of Lesley’s. However, Lesley has many passions that include reading, swimming, spending quality time with family and friends, and working alongside other enthusiastic colleagues. “I love seeing the passion for

**“I learn so much from the youth. They have affected my life in so many ways.”**

**LESLEY**  
YOUTH WORKER, CHV



the youth that come through our doors, both from new hires and long-serving staff.” Presently, Lesley is reading a lot about the world and trying to find different ways to make the world a better place.

So much can happen in 25 years. We asked Lesley to look back at what has kept her at Covenant House all these years. Her answer was this, “The youth and I haven’t gotten bored. I learn so much from the youth. They have affected my life in so many ways. Certain youth in my life have made me see things differently, which is always shaping and changing my approach to youth work and how I see the world.”

having to think to myself ‘Okay, if I go and photocopy this, it will help the team leader, which will help the youth worker, which will help the youth.’ That’s how I broke it down. I worked at the front desk (which I loved at the time), then went to UVIC to take a child and youth care program, then I started doing overnights, and then working days with youth.”

While growing at the agency, her personal life grew too. She married her love, Norm, had a son, named Josh, and took in a rescue dog named Toklo — who is a real character.



#### **VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT**

### **20 Years of relentless support**

Kristin has been volunteering for CHV for 20 years. She found out about CHV through her grandfather, who was a monthly donor. Kristin was interested in working with youth and in the issue of homelessness, so when she found one of her grandfather’s CHV pamphlets, she decided to volunteer.

Kristin began by working behind the front desk in the old building, located at Drake St. and Seymour St. She really enjoyed greeting youth and supplying them with clothing and food. One day, some volunteers were returning from a youth outing and Kristin inquired as to what they were doing. Before you know it, Kristin was taking youth out on fieldtrips.

“I’ve done the math, and I figure that I have taken youth on well over 500 fieldtrips.” She said.

For the most part, volunteers plan the youth outings. “I try to plan something that’s either culturally enriching, like plays, concerts, and festivals, or physically active, like cycling, golfing, and hiking. We often go for coffee or ice cream after an event to talk about it.”



“You never know who you’re going to reach with these fieldtrips. For example, a group of us went to see A Chorus Line



at Studio 58. One of the youth who went was very quiet and I wasn't really sure if they were enjoying themselves or not. After the event, I asked, 'How did you like it?' and that youth just launched into this huge critique. He was very engaged with the show."

On one fieldtrip, Kristin took youth to go ride around Stanley Park. "Quite often, a lot of the youth haven't grown up in Vancouver, so it's their first time seeing the seawall and it's such a spectacular view. We rented the bikes only to discover the youth didn't know how to ride a bike, or barely knew how. So, I gave them a quick little lesson. A few crashes, but we made our way through. It makes sense, when you step back and think about it. These kids often haven't had stable parents, and if you don't have a stable parent who teaches you how to ride a bike that could just slip through the cracks."

"Bowling is a really cool activity because everyone encourages each other. When you go up to bowl, everybody claps and says, 'That's great!' It doesn't matter if you're good or bad."

"The biggest challenge in my role is when a youth confides in you about some struggles that they are having. In that instance, I just do my best to be a good listener."

When asked why she has volunteered at CHV for 20 years, Kristin said, "It's the youth. It's very enjoyable spending time with them. The services CHV provides

make a big difference in the lives of the youth. I've seen this on outings."

When asked why she thought it was important to give back, Kristin said, "I think that we all have potential to make a difference and we all have talents and perspectives that we can share. I think it's also very good for our own self-development."

"Working with the youth has given me perspective about people and how their

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**KRISTIN**  
VOLUNTEER, CHV

circumstances can really shape their experiences in life. And that a lot of barriers that people face can be lessened with the support that an organization like Covenant House provides."

"I've started up again in this role, since COVID, and I didn't realize how much I missed it. I'm very grateful for my volunteer job."

CHV is grateful for Kristin. We couldn't do this life-changing work without our volunteers.

**Thank you for seeing the youth that journey to Covenant House for who they are. Thank you for helping to give them a safe place to rest and for acknowledging the circumstances that they are going through do not define them. Thank you for showing them they are worthy of love and respect.**



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