

2023

IMPACT REPORT

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Deb Lester

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Covenant
House
Vancouver

COVENANT HOUSE

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

IMPACT AT A GLANCE



119,080

Meals served



462

Number of young people who connected with our Outreach staff



124

Average number of young people served daily



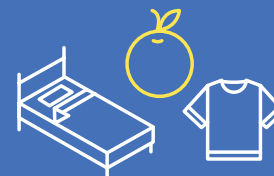
100

% Crisis Program occupancy



95

% of youth who told us CHV helped them



96 days

Average Crisis Program length of stay

Dear CHV Community,

As the new CEO of CHV, it is a true honour to be sharing our annual *Impact Report* with you. I continue to be amazed by our community of remarkable human beings who demonstrate unwavering commitment — the young people we work with, our staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners. I am honoured to be working alongside you. Everyone's commitment shines through in the impact statistics and developments shared in this report.

When I joined CHV, what stood out to me is the full continuum of services in place to meet youth wherever they are in their journeys. I truly believe that this is critical to ensure we offer a one-size-fits-one approach.

We've seen many exciting developments in our program services this year. In June, we opened our Foundations program in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health and the Foundry (Granville). This is our first program serving youth who have identified that working on their substance use was their main goal. Looking at health holistically, we identified this area as a critical gap in our services that now supports young people who previously could not access our services. We believe in the power of partnership and all we can do when united with others in a common mission.

Our total number of contacts with youth in our Outreach and Drop-In services was more than 18,600, which speaks to the breadth of the team's work and services offered. It's during those contacts when the journey towards health and wellness can begin, through the formation of relationships and the creation of trust.

The renovation of the Pender Street building for our supported transitional



housing program, Rights of Passage, is well underway. We are very much looking forward to expanding the capacity in the program from 25 to 44 beds. Rights of Passage youth and program staff are eager to move in to these fresh and dynamic new living and workspaces. The final result of this much needed renovation promises to be quite extraordinary, and we couldn't have done this without our community of donors and supporters.

As we move forward into the new year, I feel tremendously proud of the work that we continue to do to ensure the needs of young people are met. We will have a strong focus on partnering for impact in 2024, and we will continue to advocate for real change and share our learnings with others, which will expand the reach of our programs and services.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the warm welcome, and to our donors, volunteers, community partners, and staff for their constant dedication and support. Without you, none of this would be possible.

In 2024, I look forward to continuing to link arms with our community along this journey to bring our very best to the youth we serve.

With love and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deb Lester', written in a cursive style.

DEB LESTER
CEO, COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER



IMPACT OF OUR PROGRAMS IN 2023

According to the 2023 Homeless Count, the number of people in our community experiencing homelessness since 2020 has increased by 32%. Coupled with the cost-of-living and housing crises, the situation for the youth we serve has become dire. The need for our services has never been greater.

Thanks to your support, we have been able to grow to meet some of those needs in the following ways:

GENERAL PROGRAM UPDATES: The building that opened in 2022 at 1280 Seymour Street has enabled us to provide new opportunities for youth. These include art therapy sessions in a dedicated space, in-house fitness facilities, and a music room, complete with instruments. Our commercial grade kitchen has empowered the Food Services team to create delicious and healthy meals that reflect the diversity of youth we serve, and accommodate a range of celebrations and holidays. In just one year, we have also seen a 30% increase in the demand for our mental health services within the community. In 2023, we provided 999 sessions in support of youth mental health.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES: Community Support Services (CSS) is often a first point of contact between youth and Covenant House Vancouver. CSS is comprised of our Outreach team, who meet



This past year, our Drop-In Centre saw its highest attendance numbers in 10 years.



youth where they are at, and our Drop-In Centre, where youth can rest, have a warm meal, do laundry, and have a shower. This past year, our Drop-In Centre saw its highest attendance numbers in 10 years. We expanded our CSS services in several ways to better serve youth, and meet their needs. For example, all CSS staff are now being

trained for both Outreach and Drop-In, which enables youth to build even stronger relationships with staff. Youth can also now access tangible supports (like clothing, food, and referrals) seven days a week. Opening the Drop-In Centre earlier has also increased accessibility to services like our clothing room, laundry, and showers. Food services have been extended to serve youth throughout the day in our Drop-In Centre. As a result of all these expansions, youth are staying with us longer during the day, and are returning to the Drop-In Centre more frequently. This has provided us with more opportunities to connect with and support youth, to help them meet their needs, and achieve their goals.

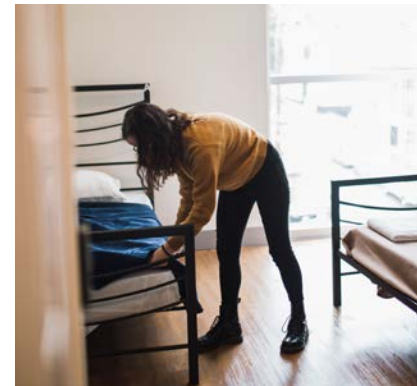
CRISIS PROGRAM: The Crisis Program is a short-term accommodation program where young people can stay free of charge for as long as they need to, because getting through a crisis takes as long as it takes. The impact of the housing crisis — unaffordable housing

The average length of stay has more than doubled to 96 days, which has also contributed to a 100% occupancy rate.



combined with long wait lists for subsidised and supportive housing — has contributed to an increased length of stay by youth in the Crisis Program. The average length of stay has more than doubled to 96 days, which has also contributed to a 100% occupancy rate. The longer stays have allowed us to build deeper relationships with the youth, which ultimately lead to better outcomes, including an increase in youth moving to stable housing upon leaving the Crisis Program.

RIGHTS OF PASSAGE: Rights of Passage is a long-term program that provides youth with safe, affordable housing and support as they transition to independent living. To better serve youth in this program, renovations to Covenant House's third site, at 326 West Pender Street, began this year. The newly renovated facility, which will increase the capacity of this program, is anticipated to open in the spring of 2024. See pages 13-14 for more information about the renovations.



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ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING TOOLKIT: Given the hidden nature of human trafficking, most Canadians are completely unaware that it occurs in our country. At Covenant House Vancouver, we serve many young people each year who are at risk of, or survivors of, exploitation and human trafficking. To address this, Covenant House Vancouver embarked on a 3-year capacity-building project, funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE). The project culminated this year with the publication of the toolkit: *Pivoting Practice: Building Capacity to Serve Youth Impacted by Trafficking*. This toolkit, the first of its kind, was developed as an anti-human trafficking toolkit to support Covenant House staff and other organizations in serving youth who are at risk of, currently experiencing, or those who have survived, human trafficking and/or exploitation.

AMALIE'S STORY

Imagine being a teenage high school graduate. You love your city, your group of friends, and your family. Suddenly, your dad becomes a person of interest to a group in power, and one day you receive a direct threat against you.

Imagine having to leave everything and everyone you know behind to move to a new country with a new culture and a new language. This was Amalie's situation when she arrived in Canada.

Having previously escaped their homeland too, Amalie's older sister was already in Covenant House Vancouver's Rights of Passage program and helped secure Amalie's passage to Canada. Amalie's dream of becoming a dental hygienist was fraught with many hurdles, compounded initially by the challenges of COVID restrictions. Grappling with the language barrier, Amalie had to retake many of her courses in English because her credits from back home were not recognized. She also had



to quickly learn how to use a computer and take social studies for her citizenship test. To support her, Covenant House Vancouver (CHV) staff provided tutors, study materials, and electronics, which also enabled her to keep in touch with her family back home. In addition to her educational pursuits, CHV connected Amalie with dental care, counselling, and newcomer services like S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

Since joining CHV, Amalie has been very engaged with the Rights of Passage program. In addition to staying culturally connected through CHV's Spiritual Care Services, she accesses a broad range of life skills training. These include oral hygiene, nutrition, laundry,



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scheduling, packing a lunch, our healthcare system, shopping, and cooking. Amalie also participates in the Mentorship Program, which gives youth the opportunity to develop healthy and trusting one-to-one relationships with responsible adults.

Amalie has had to learn, or relearn through a new lens, all of the nuances of life in Canada that many of us take for granted.

From navigating challenges like paying rent, to discovering familiar foods, and understanding how to budget and shop, through to learning how to cook to be able to prepare meals for herself, Amalie has worked hard towards achieving her independence.

Having to learn that doctors are not a threat who report to the government, or understand that sirens come from first responder vehicles instead of heralding air raids, or that the government offers financial supports that don't have to be repaid, all underlines some of what Amalie endured in her past, and the challenges that she has since overcome.

As Amalie is starting to settle into this new life, she has begun exploring her artistic side. Amalie loves to play guitar and sing, and really enjoys karaoke nights in the Rights of Passage program. Though so much remains to be experienced for the first time, Amalie has come a long way, and is now learning how to advocate for herself.

After two years of being at CHV, the trauma that Amalie has kept so carefully hidden is now beginning to surface. Coming from a war-torn part of the world, Amalie has witnessed and experienced many horrors. CHV has connected Amalie to the Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST), where she can share her stories in an



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environment that caters specifically to supporting refugees, and survivors of torture, trauma, and political violence.

There are many more aspects and elements to Amalie's story. It's incredible to think that such experiences and circumstances can befall someone who is only 20 years old. With CHV's support, Amalie is confident that she will succeed at her new life here in Canada.

What's next for Amalie? Through CHV, Amalie is currently enrolled in the YMCA job training program so that she can make a good wage, because on top of everything else, Amalie has an obligation to help support her family. But the big news is that Amalie recently returned to school to complete her math credit — the last credit needed to complete her secondary education. She needs to achieve a letter grade of a B to apply to UBC to be a dental hygienist. Amalie wishes to live independently on campus at UBC, just like her older sister is doing now.

IMPACT OF PENDER RENOVATIONS AND RIGHTS OF PASSAGE EXPANSION

Renovations to the building at 326 West Pender Street, home of the Rights of Passage program, began this year. The renovations will result in an increase of services, along with more semi-independent living spaces.

This purposefully designed building aims to nurture growth, foster community, and help youth develop essential life skills like cooking and budgeting that so many of the youth we serve have never been taught.



Thanks to our community of generous donors and government support the renovations will expand the program's capacity from **25 TO 44 BEDS**.



Through **CONSULTING WITH YOUTH** in the planning stages, designs were drafted to better meet their needs.



The new building will include a **FITNESS ROOM, A TEACHING KITCHEN, A LARGE DINING ROOM/LOUNGE, A LARGE MEETING ROOM, AND SOUNDPROOFED MEETING SPACES**.



The second-floor patio is also being redesigned into a **HANGOUT SPACE FOR ALL YOUTH** that will include a BBQ, planter boxes, and a relaxed seating area.

To better serve youth, along with renovations to the building, logistics around staffing the new space have also been revised. All Rights of Passage staff will be trained in BC's food safety program, FOODSAFE. New staff will join the team to help provide sanctuary, guidance, and a sense of belonging to even more young individuals. Rights of Passage staff will also have consistent schedules, rather than rotating, to help youth establish a sense of routine, and foster deeper connections to staff, which results in better long-term outcomes for youth. There will also be a Community Transition Coordinator who will support youth in their preparation to transition out of Rights of Passage, as well as support them when they have moved to independent living.

We can't wait to share Rights of Passage updates with you later this year!

DYLAN'S STORY

Before reaching Covenant House Vancouver, Dylan remembers that although he “had to deal with the impossible every day” the one thing he had was hope.

Growing up with his mom, younger sister, and older brothers, Dylan experienced homelessness several times since early childhood but always worked to keep everyone smiling. To teach Dylan the importance of morale, every month his mom would take the family to a restaurant to eat, even though that often meant that they would run out of food in the following days. He recognizes now how those meals were a meaningful and beautiful moment that made the next month's dinner out worth waiting for.


At age 20, Dylan and his family were evicted from their Edmonton home, leaving his mom to call around local homeless shelters, all of



which were at capacity. Dylan could afford three tickets to Vancouver for his mom, younger sister, and himself. Upon arrival, his mom searched homeless shelters in alphabetical order and called Covenant House Vancouver (CHV). Discovering there was a bed available, Dylan moved in, with his mom and sister getting into a nearby shelter.

When Dylan arrived at CHV he was surprised to find everyone as unguarded as they were. He saw a lot of who he wanted to be in the other youth. He found he was treated very well, and that the services were very accommodating. As well as catching up after a long period of sleep deprivation, Dylan started looking for work.

Dylan initially joined CHV through the Crisis Program, before moving into Rights of Passage. Through goal setting, Dylan began building relationships with CHV staff, that enabled him to open up. After initially planning on a short stay, Dylan ended up staying in the program for two years.



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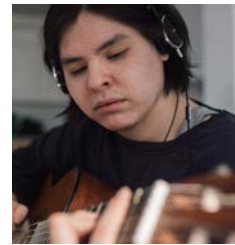
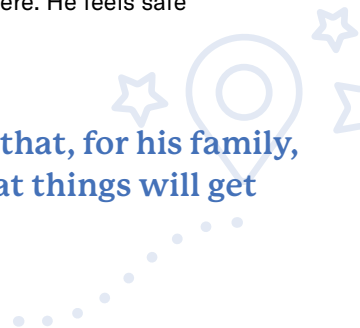
Immediately connecting with art therapy, Dylan snapped up the chance to start painting. “It was a brilliant opportunity” to share the story he was living. Having previously felt that using words would be too heavy to describe his past, art therapy led Dylan to want to communicate more about his experiences. He began sharing his paintings with his social and youth workers, as well as friends in his program.

Seeing how poetry was, “the only way to speak safely,” Dylan realized that he wanted to write poems. They allowed Dylan to communicate his thoughts, while keeping him well-guarded and protected. Helping him grow significantly in a very short period of time, Dylan would write for hours. Poetry was a means of conveying emotions that he had

learned to keep concealed in the hostile environment of his childhood.

During his time at CHV, Dylan made a close circle of friends, one of whom was a very talented guitarist, who reminded Dylan of one of his older brothers who also played. This motivated Dylan to learn. Having now combined his poetry with his music, Dylan’s song writing is “just the beginning.”

More than anything, thanks to his time at CHV, Dylan has taken away an appreciation for the safety that all youth find here. He feels safe

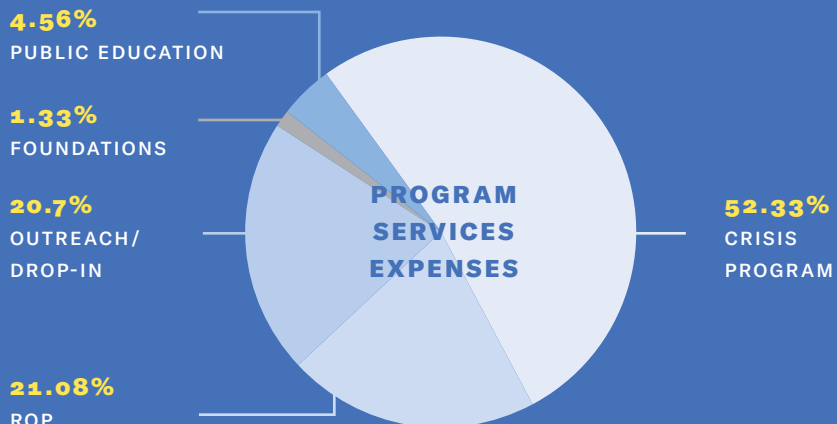
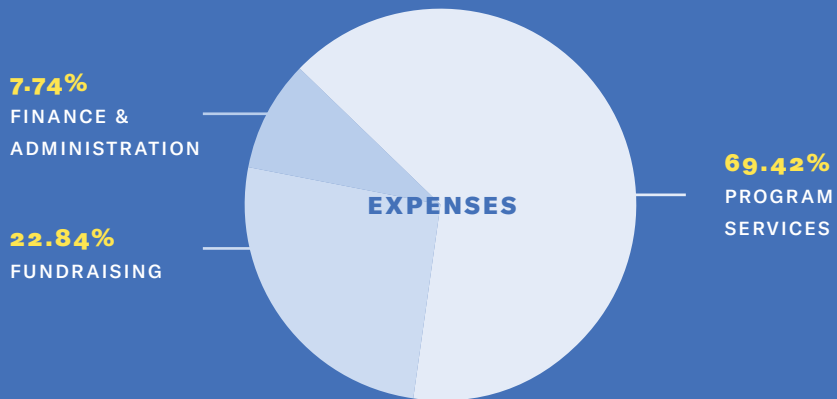
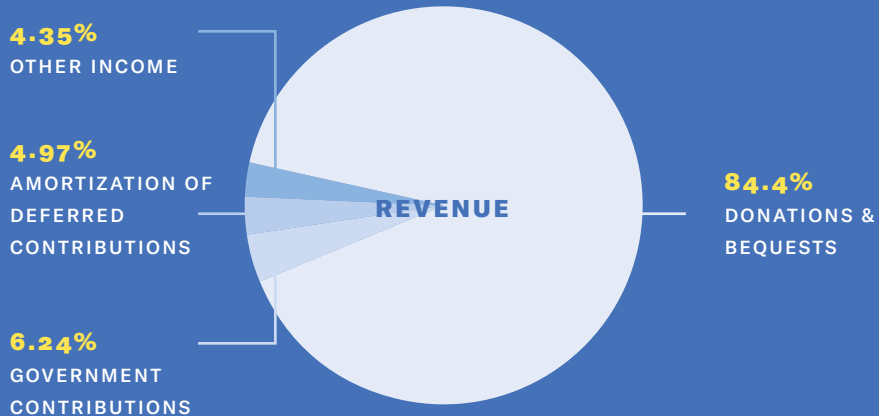
Dylan now knows that, for his family, he is “the proof that things will get better for us.”

within himself, safe for his future, he is eating well, and has enough savings in case of emergency. He recognizes the sheer amount of dedication and hard work to get to where he is now. Dylan is focused on working to “learn and understand the balance of what it means to love yourself, [and] what it means to share love with others,” something he finds his poetry helps him with enormously. Without CHV, Dylan notes he would never have had the space to discover his creativity. Speaking about CHV, Dylan sees very little else “that could have shifted” the “locked-in” foundations he started with — he values the opportunities that CHV’s programs and services afforded him.

Dylan now knows that, for his family, he is “the proof that things will get better for us.” A testament to Dylan’s humility, gratitude, and selfless strength of character is his desire to bring his family out of poverty. He also aspires to create an incredible piece of art, a masterpiece, and travel back to his home city to visit his family and friends — “there’s a lot of things I hope for still!” He “never expected the world to be so inviting.”

THE IMPACT OF YOUR GENEROSITY

Complete audited financial statements are available by request by calling 604-638-4438, or online at www.covenanthousebc.org.



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*These Directors departed November 30, 2023.