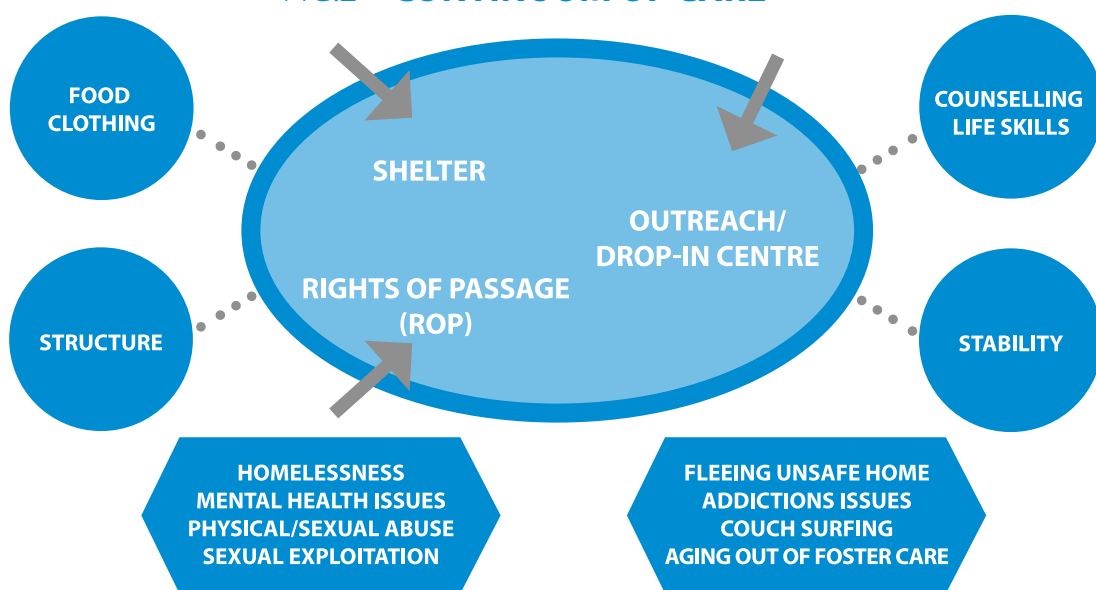


About COVENANT HOUSE

Covenant House International

Covenant House is one of the best-known international charities helping homeless youth. It is also the largest privately funded charity in the Americas for homeless and exploited youth. Founded in 1972, by Franciscan priests, Covenant House serves more than 50,000 youth a year in 21 cities in Canada, the United States, Mexico and Central America (Anchorage, Atlanta, Atlantic City, Detroit, Fort Lauderdale, Houston, Los Angeles, Managua, Mexico City, Milpas Altas, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Orlando, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Tegucigalpa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Washington, D.C.).

FIG.2 CONTINUUM OF CARE



Covenant House has three core services that make up their Continuum of Care, including Street Outreach (including community support services, outreach and drop-in services), Crisis Program (including emergency, short-term shelter beds) and Rights of Passage (longer-term transitional housing).

These core services are made of a large array of programs, depending upon the city and needs, including emergency shelters, housing, healthcare, educational support, employment readiness and skills training, drug abuse treatment and prevention, legal services, mental health services, life skills training and aftercare supports.

There are also two toll-free crisis lines for youth in the US, Canada and Mexico that answer tens of thousands of calls a year.

Five Basic Principles

The work of all Covenant Houses is governed by five core principles, which are built into the philosophy, program delivery and staff training. The principles are so integral to the work that they are also embedded into policies and procedures.

In outlining the five principles below, the citations come from [Covenant House International website](#) (**CHI**) and Covenant House Vancouver's (**CHV**) ROP Participant Guide and speak to how each of these principles plays out in the work of ROP.

These principles are important for an agency to consider as it develops its program. As an international organization there are key philosophies that apply to all Covenant House agencies. The same may be true with a large agency with multiple programs. The contrast with the way in which Covenant House Vancouver has interpreted the principles is presented here to show you how a program within an agency may create their own understanding and implementation of the broader principles.

IMMEDIACY

CHI: Homeless kids come to Covenant House in crisis. Immediately and without question, we meet their basic human needs – a nourishing meal, a shower, clean clothes, medical attention, and a safe place away from the dangers of the street.

CHV: Immediacy means that needs are addressed as quickly as possible. ROP is staffed 24 hours, so that you always have someone available to talk to or to ask for support.

Immediacy also means that communication about needs and other important issues should be timely. You will have regular meetings with your Key Youth Worker, but you should keep the staff on duty informed whenever you are dealing with something that staff might be able to help with. When staff recognize the need to address something with you (e.g. about your behaviour or your plan) you can expect that they will do so promptly.

SANCTUARY

CHI: Homeless kids arriving at our door are often frightened and mistrustful. Young men and women can grow only when they feel safe and secure – Covenant House protects them from the perils of the street and offers that important sense of security.

CHV: Sanctuary means that ROP is meant to be a safe place for all. Our staff are committed to maintaining an environment where all the residents can feel secure, build trust, and be free of abuse and negative pressure. Everyone has to contribute to creating this environment. You should inform staff at once if you are feeling physically or emotionally unsafe. You will be expected to refrain from behaviours that threaten the sanctuary of others.

VALUE COMMUNICATION

CHI: Lying, cheating, and stealing are common survival tools on the street. Covenant House teaches by example that caring relationships are based on trust, respect, and honesty.

CHV: Moving away from street values and developing a healthy set of personal values is part of the work of ROP participants. Honesty, caring, accountability and mutual respect are values that we all strive to live and model.

STRUCTURE

CHI: Homeless kids never know how they will get their next meal or where they will sleep. Covenant House provides the stability and structure necessary to build a positive future.

CHV: If you have been staying at the CHV Crisis Program, you have experienced structure in the form of strict schedules and rules that are needed for establishing stability in that environment. At ROP, there are also some schedules and rules that must be followed by everyone, but structure is also meant to be individualized and internalized.

You will be involved in the process of setting expectations for yourself as you identify goals and as you take responsibility for working toward those goals. The aim is that by the time you leave, you will have practice in deciding and setting up the routines and self-discipline that are important to you so you can continue to do so independently.

For example, once on your own you will be able to live by a budget, get enough sleep, get to work on time, avoid triggers to destructive behaviours, decide when you will do your dishes, when you will study etc. The gradual move to setting structure independently is facilitated by the six steps of the ROP program. As you move through the steps, more and more of the responsibility lies with you.

CHOICE

CHI: Young people often feel powerless to control their lives and fall into a self-defeating cycle of failure. Covenant House fosters confidence, encouraging young people to believe in themselves and make smart choices for their lives.

CHV: At CHV, we support your right and responsibility to make choices for your own life. You make choices every day, by doing certain things and by not doing other things. We will support you in exploring the options that are open to you, and recognizing all of the little choices that you have to make every day. We will also support you in forming a plan that fits you, based on your own preferences and dreams. Part of the work of staff is to help you evaluate the possible results of each choice that you make. Our goal is to empower you with information and skills for positive decision-making.

Covenanting with the Youth

Every Covenant House creates a ‘covenant’ with each young person. The word covenant means ‘a coming together’. CHV says, “Covenants involve a mutual agreement, a relationship in which each party lays out what they are committed to doing.”

When a youth comes to our doors, we make a covenant, or a promise, to support them every step of the way to independence. We share our guiding principles with them, which include providing immediate care and sanctuary, modeling and communicating positive values, as well as offering structure and helpful choices ([Covenant House Toronto website](#)).

In return, youth are required to follow rules and to create a plan with their Youth Worker. Each plan is individualized to the youth and could include education, work or an alternative plan focused on addictions, mental health or other health concerns. The goal is overall independence to enable the youth to live a healthy and productive life in the community.

“The whole Covenant approach is that we would basically sit down, contract with the young person, understanding that it’s their choice to be here and that they’re the ones that have to focus and drive the plan. But basically, we piece that plan together in a way that will work for that young person. We customize it along the way.”

—Bruce Rivers, Executive Director, Covenant House Toronto

These plans are particularly important for the Rights of Passage program and will be explored in greater detail later on.

"We would basically sit down, contract with the young person, understanding that it's their choice to be here and that they're the ones that have to focus and drive the plan."

—Bruce Rivers, Covenant House Toronto

Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver Overview

The youth that are served by Covenant House vary in the needs and events that brought them to seek shelter. For both Toronto and Vancouver, a majority of youth (as much as 70%) have fled physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse or had been kicked out of their home. In more recent years there has been an increase “in the number of youth presenting with serious mental health and addictions issues”, including as many as half of the youth seen in Vancouver ([Covenant House Vancouver website](#)). There are also a high number of youth who have “aged out” of the foster care system and have no place to go. The agencies report that an estimated 30% of the young people they work with have been involved in some form of the sex trade and/or subjected to sexual exploitation.

Following the continuum of care model both Covenant House Toronto and Covenant House Vancouver provide a variety of different supports. These vary by location, but between the two sites include 24/7 crisis care, counselling, health care, education, employment training and assistance, transitional housing and support youth as they move from homelessness to independence. They work to build confidence and life-skills to increase each young person’s ability to achieve greater success.



Toronto, ON.



Vancouver, BC.

COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO (CHT)

Covenant House Toronto was the second international Covenant House site and opened in 1982, stemming from an idea of the late Cardinal Carter. The largest homeless youth agency in Canada, CHT is the second largest Covenant House in the world (after New York City) and serves an average of 3,000 young people annually. CHT has served about 90,000 youth since it opened its doors.

Covenant House Toronto currently has:

- » 94 shelter beds (58 for males and 36 for females)
- » 28 beds in the Rights of Passage Transitional Housing program (18 for males and 10 for females)

There are about 250 youth coming and going every day.

COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER (CHV)

Covenant House Vancouver opened in September 1997 with 12 beds and was full immediately. CHV has remained full ever since. Supported initially by Covenant House Toronto, CHV was formed to address a crisis of high numbers of youth living on the streets of Vancouver and a lack of shelter and transitional housing supports for youth.

During the fiscal year 2013-2014, a total of 1,375 youth accessed the services of Covenant House Vancouver and the agency provides ongoing support (food, counselling, shelter and clothing) to the approximately 700 homeless youth living in Vancouver.

Covenant House Vancouver currently has:

- » 54 beds in the Crisis Program (30 for males and 24 for females)
- » 25 beds in the Rights of Passage Transitional Housing program (13 for males and 12 for females)