

SCATTERED SITE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING *Program at Covenant House*

In following the Foyer’s Hub and Spoke model, both Covenant House Toronto (CHT) and Covenant House Vancouver (CHV) have developed different forms of transitional housing (besides their onsite Rights of Passage Program). Both agencies have a partnership with Hollyburn Properties, a large property management company that provides three apartments in Vancouver and two apartments in Toronto. CHT also has two condominium units through a partnership with the Daniels Corporation, a residential developer.

Toronto anticipates having 20 supported scattered-site apartments in total within the next three years, including [a specialized program for women](#) who are victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Vancouver also hopes to increase the size of its off-site transitional housing offerings.

Additionally, both organizations have housing workers who strive to develop connections with landlords – whether they are landlords who rent a room in their own home or those with multiple or large-scale rental opportunities.

While Covenant House Toronto has a more organized after-care component, both organizations try to stay connected with youth who leave to help address issues and prevent them from becoming homeless again.



“One of the things that we’ve found over the last several years is that young people are staying longer and longer in our shelter and part of the reason for that is... there are no affordable housing options for kids to move to in community. So we came up with the idea that we needed to create some of those options ourselves. We were turning to government but, quite frankly, government was not able to come forward with solutions that could meet or stem the tide of demand. We felt that we needed to come up with a customized approach that would work for the young people that we’re seeing. So that has helped to yield results with our new transitional housing program...our scattered apartment program.”

—Bruce Rivers, Executive Director, Covenant House Toronto

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

One of the successes of Covenant House's transitional housing program is the variety of options available to youth and this is a key consideration for any agency. Often, transitional housing is considered only within a bricks and mortar model; all residents housed in the same location. If proper support is provided it is possible to have a pure scattered site model as evidenced by the success of the [Calgary Boys and Girls Club's Infinity Project](#). ROP and Covenant House demonstrate that a melding of these two options, with both scattered site and residential transitional housing units provided, is also possible.

Housing Workers

Given the lack of affordable housing across the country, it is very beneficial to have workers whose primary focus is helping youth find, secure and maintain housing. Youth often lack key components necessary for accessing housing, including identification, references, income or the knowledge around how to even start their housing search.

Both locations employ [Housing Workers](#) whose job it is to help youth find housing after they leave ROP (or the crisis/shelter program). This support includes conducting an assessment of their housing readiness, needs and budgets. The Housing Workers will discuss the type and cost of housing available. This includes exploring housing options, such as independent living, shared accommodation, supportive housing or other transitional housing facilities.

When possible/requested, Housing Workers also support the youth in accessing and applying for that housing, including filling in applications, meeting with landlords and negotiating leases. Depending upon availability, a Housing Worker (or other ROP staff) may also drive a youth through their new neighbourhood to help them figure out where to access groceries, recreation, transit and other necessities in their new environment.

In the scattered site housing units, ongoing support is still provided by the Housing Workers and Case Managers in Vancouver. While this was also the case in Toronto, a recent switch has moved all aftercare into the realm of the Youth in Transition Workers (this will be discussed later in this chapter).

“The best part of the work for me is when I house a youth and you see them grow. You see them gain that confidence to be on their own. You can see that they're actually cooking their meals. You see that they're not depending on other people for their own money, they're actually looking for work [or] they're going to school. [They're] doing what they want to do and succeeding.”

—Danny Aguilar, Housing Worker, Covenant House Toronto



A Rights of Passage youth's empty room at Covenant House Toronto.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Avoiding the revolving door of homelessness, as discussed in the Youth Homelessness Overview chapter, is a difficult challenge to overcome. Housing Workers play a critical role in helping youth obtain and maintain housing. There are a few ways that a Housing Worker can help support a youth:

- » Create a sense of connection to their new community. A youth who is more engaged will hopefully not seek out old neighbourhoods which may draw them back in to a previous way of life.
- » Under promise and over deliver. Housing workers need to be clear about what they are and are not able to do. It is better to be able to provide better service than to not meet the minimum expectations of the service.
- » Strive to reduce unrealistic ideas about what they can obtain by way of housing. Being able to work with youth to develop a budget is helpful to increase a youth's understanding of their financial status in relationship to the market.
- » Housing workers should give youth in-depth information about landlord-tenant legislation, and in particular, the youth's rights and responsibilities. Helping a youth avoid eviction because of activities or behaviour that could have been prevented with a bit of knowledge, is a key way of reducing a youth's return to homelessness.

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—Danny Aguilar, Covenant House Toronto

WORKING WITH LANDLORDS

Another advantage of employing Housing Workers is that they are able to dedicate time and energy to building extensive connections and networks with landlords to help house youth quickly. Building these partnerships is a key to helping increase the availability of housing for youth.

Part of this work is educating a landlord about the misconceptions they may hold about homeless youth and social assistance. Landlords may not understand the benefits of accepting a youth on a rent supplement, housing allowance or who is receiving social assistance – primarily that in most cases it is a form of guaranteed income that is not lost unless the youth gains employment or other positive things occur in their lives.

CHT and CHV work to create partnerships with landlords wherein everyone wins – agency, landlord and youth. One component is ensuring that a landlord knows that the agency understands that the landlord is trying to make money; that housing is a business for them. Letting landlords know that the agency is going to be involved with the youth helping them transition into housing and can be called upon to help address problems reassure landlords that there is a reduced risk at play for them.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Housing Workers need to be clear in their agreements with landlords. They cannot promise perfect behaviour by a young person or guarantee that there will never be a problem with rent. They can explain the ways in which the agency will support the youth, and in turn, the landlord.

Housing workers should educate landlords about homeless youth to help reduce misconceptions. This may also involve education about social assistance programs.

Creating a network of landlords who are willing to house homeless youth is important. Provide resources and information opportunities for landlords. Landlords should also be informed that youth have been educated about landlord-tenant legislation and know responsibilities and also their rights.



Community Apartments

The Housing Workers, and other staff, work with youth to get them housed and established in off-site community apartments. The lack of affordable housing and the high costs of rent in both Toronto and Vancouver make this particularly challenging, but the agencies have reduced barriers through partnerships and relationships with builders, property management companies and landlords.

Having a youth transition to independent living after being in the Rights of Passage program provides some distinct advantages for the youth compared to moving directly from the street or even a shelter. Each youth will have some amount of money saved, either through personal savings or from their graduation bursary in Vancouver or their Trust Fund payment in Toronto. This helps reduce a big barrier to obtaining housing – the ability to pay both first and last month’s rent, as well as any deposits (keys, utilities etc.). Youth are also able to provide Covenant House staff as a reference to the landlord, which also gives them a leg up.

Additionally, youth who stay at Covenant House (in either the crisis shelter program or ROP) have worked to develop a budget so they have an understanding of what the needs and costs are for independent living. Those coming out of ROP have a further advantage in that they have “practiced” paying a rent-like amount through their program fee/Trust Fund payment so they better understand prioritizing rent, food and transportation.

HOLLYBURN PROPERTIES PARTNERSHIP WITH COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO AND VANCOUVER

Both Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver have partnered with [Hollyburn Properties](#) to create a dynamic and innovative youth transitional housing model. Hollyburn is a Canadian, family-owned company based in Vancouver with apartments across Metro Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa. One of their core principles – commitment – includes “becoming an active, contributing partner in every neighbourhood we are privileged to be a part of.”

In 2000, when one of the owners, Paul Sander, and his then 10-year old daughter were visiting Toronto, she was struck by the sight of a young woman in her early teens panhandling near the restaurant they were eating at. Upon returning home, Paul and his wife discussed the issue with her in more detail, and they decided to get involved.

“I’ve dealt with [homelessness] around the property management industry as far as asking people to move along...and I’d never thought of it as something we could do something about.”

—Paul Sander, Director, Hollyburn Properties

Initially, the partnership included collecting goods for youth at Covenant House Vancouver, including food and clothing. This eventually expanded to collecting furniture and household necessities for youth moving into independent living. Both of these ventures presented challenges in terms of collection, quality of donations, repairs/cleaning and storage. However, they created a fierce sense of community among the staff and also the tenants. Additionally, the moving company that they contracted with to move the belongings began to employ youth from CHV creating increased employment opportunities for youth.

The issue of homelessness was nothing new. As an urban property management company, Sander says, “Building Managers have to address people sleeping in parkades, under building eaves, inside apartment buildings.” One of the aspects of the partnership included providing education to Building Managers and staff to help them both better understand the issue and how to improve their response.

Gradually, there was a decision that the company wanted to be more pro-active in their response. They decided to develop a housing program that would give a fully furnished unit to Covenant House for a youth to live in for a year. With the success of the program, it was gradually expanded with additional units in Vancouver (now a total of three) as well as the expansion of the program to include two units in Toronto.

“Hollyburn is the crème de la crème of transitional units.

Hollyburn will give you everything.”

—Danny Aguilar, Housing Worker, Covenant House Toronto

Hollyburn solicits interest from Building Managers and considers the most accessible locations to determine the best fit and see where they might be able to house a youth. A bachelor or small one-bedroom unit is made available through a head lease^[9] with Covenant House. Youth pay a reduced rental amount, about \$300-\$375 to Hollyburn, who subsidizes the remainder of the market rent. Cable and internet are provided free of charge, and the youth is responsible to pay for Hydro and home insurance. Covenant House provides a tax-receipt to Hollyburn for the full market rent for the year as well as a tax receipt for all suite furnishings



A Hollyburn Properties building, Toronto, ON.

Hollyburn buys all of the necessary items for the unit including furniture, linens, small appliances etc. They estimate that this costs about \$3,000/unit. When a youth leaves the unit they are able to take all of the items with them to help them get established in their next home.

Covenant House screens a youth – sometimes, but not always, a graduate of the Rights of Passage Program – and provides ongoing case management support to the youth. Part of the support includes providing orientation to the youth about their housing: introducing them to key people, explaining expectations of independent living, discussing who is responsible for what aspect (i.e. internet, utilities). Generally the agreement is in place for a one-year period and then the youth can either move to a new location elsewhere with the help of their housing workers or in another Hollyburn unit at market rent. (Hollyburn hopes to create “happy Hollyburn tenants” according to Paul Sander) and if necessary, to extend the agreement for another year. The program is flexible so as to ensure each youth has the greatest opportunity of success. As of 2014, 10 youth had successfully graduated from this partnership and five were currently living in subsidized units in Vancouver and Toronto.

This housing is considered transitional and programmatic supports are still in place, but there is a greater sense of independence compared to ROP, and particularly compared to the shelter. Youth who have benefitted from Hollyburn’s support have made mention that one of the biggest barriers they face, when striving for independence, is a fair opportunity to live outside of the demographic associated with their homeless past. The Covenant House-Hollyburn Properties Youth Housing Program provides these youth with an opportunity to begin a new life and to break free from the cycle of chronic homelessness in a safe and secure building that they can take pride in and call their own. This component is often the key to leaving street life behind, once and for all. Youth in Hollyburn units are still required to have a case plan in place and to be in contact with their worker. They pay a fee instead of rent to Hollyburn Properties (or Covenant House directly in Toronto); in Vancouver, this money is returned in full or part and is used to help establish the youth in future housing.

In Vancouver, the Hollyburn apartments fall under the Community Support Services department and support (usually weekly) is provided by the Housing Workers/Case Managers. In Toronto, Hollyburn apartments are part of the Transitional Housing portfolio. The Housing Worker and the Manager of Transitional Housing oversee the selection and move-in process, while the Youth in Transition Workers provide the ongoing support.

Hollyburn and Covenant House also hold regular meetings attended by staff from the two organizations, including Building Managers of the Hollyburn buildings and Covenant House Case Managers in Vancouver/Youth in Transition Workers/Housing Workers in Toronto. This provides an opportunity to discuss ongoing issues, although immediate or crisis issues can be addressed through a phone call or emergency meeting.

Hollyburn has identified some key learnings and suggestions from their experience:

- » It is more efficient to buy the furniture and household goods than to receive and manage donations. They estimate it costs about \$3,000.
- » The Building Manager/Superintendents must be onboard. While education helps provide information, the most successful situations have come because the Building Manager has taken ownership of the program. Hollyburn Building Managers play a pivotal role in providing guidance, structure and support to the youth, ensuring their suites are kept in order and that building rules are followed.

- » Youth often have more “traffic” and may be noisier than older adults in the same building. Hollyburn recommends housing the youth on the ground floor or in another area that will reduce the impact on other tenants. (This is less of an issue in buildings that have a higher number of college or university students as the behaviour is similar).
- » Education may be required with tenants to help them understand why it is important to provide this kind of support and to assure them that any issues will be addressed.
- » Communication is key. The ability for the youth or Hollyburn staff to reach out to Covenant House when there is a problem is important, but the regular meetings ensures that the connection is always in place, not just when there is a problem.

“Homelessness impacts rental buildings on a regular basis. Most managers can tell you about issues they’ve had with homelessness around their buildings, and so, it’s kind of a natural partnership, if you think about it. We want to have good tenants in our buildings. This is a way to take kids that are on the street, that are otherwise sleeping in our doorways and our parkades, and turn them around and give them a foot up, and a helping hand and turn them into future renters, that are reliable. And that little bit of help makes a huge difference to kids at that vulnerable stage in life and so, I think operationally, it’s a natural. It’s something that landlords have; they have the suites, it’s team building and it creates a culture of charity within your company.”

—Paul Sander, Director, Hollyburn Properties

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

- » This is an amazing and innovative partnership. It addresses a core need – lack of housing – while allowing a business to give back.
- » This initiative is easier to do in a big city where there are larger amounts of rental housing stock (and bigger companies). But it is still possible to do in small communities. Even an individual landlord who has a few units may decide to sacrifice the income of a unit in exchange for helping to improve the life chances of a homeless youth. Full tax receipts for market rent and suite furnishings make participation more accessible for landlords of all sizes.
- » One of the keys to this initiative is the ongoing support provided by Covenant House and the open communication. Clear agreements and understanding must be in place for all parties – the landlord/property management company and their staff, the youth and the support organization.
- » Donation management can be extremely challenging. Buying new furnishings and essentials also ensures youth are – perhaps for the first time in many years if ever – given belongings that are new and not just “new to them.”

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THE DANIELS CORPORATION PARTNERSHIP WITH COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO

[The Daniels Corporation](#) is a Toronto-based builder/developer with a long history of addressing issues of homelessness and affordable housing. Daniels recently partnered with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation in the redevelopment of Regent Park in the heart of downtown Toronto. As part of this work, Daniels also created a unique partnership with Covenant House Toronto (CHT) by making two (unfurnished) condominiums units available at a very minimal cost.

“Daniels - they give you a brand-new unit, a brand new condominium unit! Everything is brand new!!”
—Danny Aguilar, Housing Worker, Covenant House Toronto

Similar to the Hollyburn partnerships, CHT is responsible for selecting, orienting and providing ongoing support to the young person. The youth pays \$480/month, including insurance and hydro; this amount is well below market rent. The Daniels Corporation then donates the youth's rent payment back to CHT in exchange for a tax receipt.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR SEX-TRAFFICKED VICTIMS AT COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO

Still in development, the recently announced project will house up to seven female residents, ages 16-24, who are victims of sex trafficking. Covenant House estimates that dozens of their young people, mostly women, have been exploited through trafficking. They also estimate that about 1,000 of the youth they work with annually are involved in the sex trade, mostly engaging in survival sex.

The program is a partnership between Covenant House Toronto, The Rotary Club of Toronto's Women's Initiatives Committee, Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) and the City of Toronto. A TCHC property will be leased to Covenant House for a 15-year period at a minimal cost. The City of Toronto will provide capital funding for repairs and renovations, while CHT will fund ongoing maintenance, as well as operating costs.

Residents will be allowed to stay for up to two years and will receive a range of supports, including educational and vocational, life skills training, trauma and addiction counselling and free legal assistance.

Aftercare

The provision of aftercare –a key component of the Foyer program—is different at each location and is somewhat dependent upon age of the youth. In both locations, youth fall under Covenant House’s mandate until the age of 25. That means that youth are able to access certain services at Covenant House, such as crisis shelter, drop-in and outreach, thus keeping them connected to supports even after they are housed independently or elsewhere. In Vancouver, for example, youth under 25 can come back to the weekly community dinner, thus guaranteeing one good meal and social support/connection each week.

Youth over 25 face different issues because Covenant House is no longer mandated or funded to provide care. Covenant House staff are always available for a youth to reach out to and the 24-hour staffing in the ROP guarantees that someone is always there. Certainly in cases of emergency, staff would not turn a former resident away, but they are challenged in terms of providing ongoing supports. Covenant House will do their best to transition youth to new community supports, both for them to access as a youth, but importantly when a youth is aging out of Covenant House’s care.

Danny Aguilar, Covenant House Toronto’s Housing Worker says that the aftercare component is one of the most critical considerations for any agency developing transitional housing. He says, “It’s not just getting them graduated. It’s keeping them outside the shelter system and maintaining their own place. The after-care has to be there. Because sometimes when a youth just leaves a program, they feel alone.”

CHT: Toronto has several Youth in Transition (YIT) Workers who work with youth leaving the shelter or ROP program. These workers support youth in any type of transition (leaving a shelter or ROP, new to Toronto or Canada, life changes etc.) with a significant focus on youth who are leaving the child welfare system. An outreach-based program, YIT is specifically designed to help youth who may resist coming in to an agency setting to access services. Meetings are held regularly in a location that works for the youth, including their home, another agency or a neighbourhood location, such as a coffee shop. YIT Workers can help youth face challenges and feel less alone. They can provide support or guidance on issues identified by the youth or accompany youth to appointments.

YIT Workers also build local support networks for the youth, helping them with life skills or learn about the resources available in their community such as stores, laundromat or food bank. They also help youth access social and recreational supports to get them better connected to their community.

CHV: For youth living in scattered site, market, or other forms of housing, the Housing Workers and the assigned Case Manager provide the transition supports to the youth up to their 25th birthday. CHV believes that keeping with the same worker can be valuable based for attachment. For ROP youth specifically, staff formally follow up with youth minimally at the three, six, nine and 12 month markers after they leave the program (regardless of age). These contacts are recorded in the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database ([for more on ETO see the Evaluation section](#)). Youth Workers are able to remain in contact and continue to support past residents up to their 25th birthday as well, and many of them remain in touch via phone or email or continue to visit long after that.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Discharge and aftercare must be carefully considered when developing a transitional housing program. Creating programs such as CHT's Youth in Transition or CHV's aftercare supports could certainly be considered the gold standard of community-based supports for youth. While not every organization can fund the wide range of aftercare supports that Covenant House does, it is important to ensure that youth are aware of their options after they leave:

- » What are the opportunities for them to come back to the original agency? Can they call, drop by or receive outreach visits? Are there activities that they are still able to participate in?
- » Where else are they able to access support? Is there an adult drop-in or meal program nearby? Is there a community recreational option?
- » Can they be matched up with a mentor during their stay who can continue to provide ongoing support after they graduate/leave?
- » Are all of the necessary physical or mental health or addictions supports lined up, including both medical and community supports?