

# The right to safety and shelter

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On any given night, it is estimated that there are between 500 and 1,000 “street” youth in Vancouver.

The homeless young people (aged 12-24) who come to Covenant House face many obstacles to achieving independence:

- About 50% of the youth Covenant House serves have been in the foster care system
- The majority of street youth have experienced physical, sexual and or emotional abuse, often at the hands of the adults that were responsible for taking care of them
- Vancouver’s downtown streets can be dangerous; sexual exploitation, drug abuse, poverty and illness are commonplace on the streets and many of our youth are re-victimized there, having fled one unsafe situation only to find their circumstances often worse

Combined with these traumas and often because of them, is the prevalence of mental illness amongst homeless youth; a wide range of mental illnesses ranging from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to bi-polar disorder to drug-induced psychosis plague our youth in growing numbers and are often left untreated with devastating impacts

Homeless young people also struggle with substance abuse and often use drugs and alcohol as a way to “numb” the pain they experience in their lives and to help them forget; on their own, mental illness and addictions are challenging enough to overcome, but presented together, as it often the case with our youth, proves to be extremely debilitating.

These young people are chronically hard to house and it takes a coordinated effort between the community, landlords, mental health and social workers etc. working together to find safe and affordable housing for them.

Access to safety and housing is a basic right for young people (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 27).

To learn more about how Covenant House provides is working to uphold the rights of street youth visit [www.covenanthousebc.org](http://www.covenanthousebc.org). To learn more about child and youth rights and how everyone can take action for children and youth visit [www.scyofbc.org](http://www.scyofbc.org) and [www.everychild.ca](http://www.everychild.ca).