



Stories of hope YEAR 1

*Dianne's story**

Being a Good Mom

Dianne grew up in and out of foster homes. She was sexually abused by family members. When she was 17, she started drinking, which led to drug abuse and the world of crime, including being involved with gangs. During this time her children were taken away and placed in government care. She spiralled downward from there, into a life of prostitution and homelessness.

Then Dianne heard about the Homeward Bound program through the YMCA Transitional Housing Facility. She made the decision to change her life and with the help of Homeward Bound she found a home. Six months later she's still living there, raising her 3 month old baby. She recently completed and complied well with a three-month Supervision Order with Children's Services during which time she went to drug relapse prevention and parenting classes on a regular basis. She is receiving income supports and working on getting her basic ID and opening a bank account.

Dianne has goals now: to complete high school, pursue post-secondary training, and to reconnect with her other children.



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*Elaine's story**

Finding Joy

Elaine's past is one of abuse and violence. But her future is one of hope and determination. For the past 10 years, this 45 year old woman spent most of her nights on the streets, sleeping in abandoned cars or in the river valley. She sold her body to support her crack addiction. One night she was picked up by a john who tried to kill and bury her in the bush outside of Edmonton. She escaped through sheer will to live. Recently, Elaine was diagnosed with cancer and other health issues.

The door to change opened when Elaine was able to connect with the YMCA Homeward Bound program. She's now lived in her own home for four months. She's been drug and alcohol free that whole time, and is doing well in her fight against cancer. Elaine has reconnected with her family, and says she finds joy in living what she calls a "quiet residential life".

When Elaine feels stress, she takes her dog for a walk in her quiet neighbourhood. On a map, it's just a few miles from her past life. But in her mind, it's light years away.



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*Laura's story**

Learning to Set Goals

Laura is a 60 year old woman, who was orphaned at an early age and raised by relatives. She was physically and emotionally abused. She grew up and married and had three children, but after her husband died she lost her home because of her gambling addiction.

That addiction also ruined her relationship with her children. After living in a shelter, Laura came to Boyle Street Community Services. There, support workers helped her find a safe, affordable home. Supports were put in place to help Laura manage her finances and she was connected with an addictions counselor.

Today, Laura is still living in her home. She manages her money and says she is now able to set financial goals, something she'd never been able to do in the past. And she's reconnected with her children.



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*Leslie's story**

I've got my life back

Leslie hit rock bottom in December 2007. In her mid-50's, she'd been living without a home for 7 years. She was a crack addict, walked with crutches; her health was failing and her relationship was abusive.

Leslie had a tough childhood. At age 10, she was sent away from home and lived in institutions until she was 18. She felt rejected by her family and deep loneliness while growing up in institutions.

She married young and had 3 children. She became a single mom, and managed to pay the rent and bills. She smoked pot and hash occasionally, but a few years later she made some new friends who were into hard drugs. That's when Leslie first tried crack. She also started gambling...too much. She eventually spent all her rent money on gambling and was evicted. Her troubles piled up and a short while later Leslie found herself homeless. She slept outside on discarded mattresses, behind dumpsters, in stair wells and parks. She started using more crack.

But on that fateful day in 2007, when hope had all but disappeared, she talked to a friend who was a pastor. He got Leslie into a detox centre. From there she made it to the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre where outreach workers helped her find a home, including the money to pay her first month's rent and damage deposit, help with finding furniture and with moving in.

Since moving into her own place there have been ups and downs. But Leslie is learning to live again. She says she feels human; she can love and laugh. She's slowly earning back the trust of her children and re-uniting with her brothers. And she has a message to all those helping her on this new path.

"I love you. I appreciate everything you've done for me. Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre is the reason I started straightening out. It was a safe place. Thank you."



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*Sheila's story**

Gaining Control over Mental Illness

Hospital rooms were a common place for Sheila to spend nights in the past. She has significant health issues: genetic lung disease/COPD and schizophrenia. The fact that she had no home made these even worse. For 5+ years, Sheila's good nights meant a bed in a rooming house; bad nights were spent on the streets, where she was a victimized on more than one occasion.

Last November, Sheila was hospitalized in an Edmonton psychiatric unit. She completed her treatment, but the doctor wouldn't discharge her until she had a place to go. That place was found in February, when Sheila was accepted in the Pathways to Housing Program. Now, just a month later, she has rapidly stabilized. Sheila is focusing primarily on socialization skills and adjusting to a new life style – one that's a far cry from the realities of living on the street. And since coming to Pathways to Housing, she hasn't been back in hospital.