

“It was like being hit by a car.”

It’s hard to imagine what it would be like to learn that you have a life-threatening illness. But when Mark was diagnosed with HIV in April of last year, that’s how he felt. *“I was **devastated**, in total disbelief and asked them to check again. I was depressed and there was sense of denial and bewilderment. I thought I was going to be dead in six months.”*

When the social worker at the hospital inquired as to his current situation, his response was very frank. *“I was literally living in stairwells. Refused to go to a shelter because of all the horror stories I had heard – theft, violence.”* That’s when he was first referred to the Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) at Fife House.

Last year, HOP worked with 360 clients, housing and supporting 147 individuals and families. Another 160 were provided with housing help consultations to assist in their search for affordable accommodation in Toronto. Although it has the largest caseload at Fife House, there are only two full-time staff in the program.

After meeting with his worker, Mark was deemed a suitable candidate for our Transitional Housing Program (THP). The unit houses up to eleven clients, who are each furnished with a bachelor unit with kitchenette and bathroom, while sharing common living, dining, kitchen and laundry facilities. The maximum stay is nine months.

When introduced to the THP, Mark said *“When he showed me one of the units and said ‘it’s available’, I was **just happy to have a roof over my head**, sleeping on a mattress, even if it was only for a few days. There was a sense of relief. But there was also a question mark – what is this going to be like, what are the other people going to be like?”*

The primary goal for all residents in THP is to find permanent housing. Many residents have been living on the streets or in shelters for a long time and require assistance in activities of daily living, like budgeting, shopping, meal preparation and social interaction. The staff provide intensive case management and work with residents to develop a goal-focused plan to ensure that housing, once acquired, will be maintained.

Mark describes himself as someone who keeps to himself, and was quite isolated before coming to the THP. Once there, however, he *“bonded with another resident and **developed a good friendship**”* – in fact, more than one, and he has managed to maintain them. *“I had contact with other people, other lifestyles that I probably would not have interacted with.”*

During his stay, Mark had access to medical attention, but he needed to locate services that would provide financial support. He also needed to learn what other options were available to him in the community. Fife House staff were with him every step of the way.

“You have gone the extra mile to bring me up when everything was down; you’ve fed me, clothed me, assisted me with health issues, housing issues and even social concerns. The staff have assisted me in every imagined way and made my stay both productive and great. (They) have made me feel at home.”

Now Mark is living independently in a small apartment that he feels has everything he needs. He hopes to return to the job market, having already connected with some former colleagues and friends. He says that his future *“looks more hopeful than it did. I feel great, **I’ve gotten my life back together and gotten back some of my self esteem**”*

Mark’s story is just one of many. Last year THP helped 20 persons rebuild their lives and start living independently in the community. But we can’t do it without the help of our donors and supporters, people like you who make these programs possible.

Fife House has been helping men, women and families find safe, affordable housing for more than 25 years. With your help, we are able to tell stories like Mark’s, a journey from homelessness and despair to one of hope for the future.

On behalf of all the people whose lives have been transformed by your generosity, thank you.