OVERCOMING HOMELESSNESS

"Becoming homeless was really stressful. The first time I really didn't have anywhere to stay, I spent the night on the shores of a lake in my neighbourhood. I didn't know what else to do.

It started when I was 15—I was removed from my family home by the police when things got really bad one day. I ended up doing a lot of couch surfing, but thankfully, I only spent a few nights outside.

Things didn't get better when I graduated from high school; they actually got worse. I was still angry and hurt. I ended up hitchhiking across the country, getting into drugs and living on the streets.

But in 2015, I was offered the chance to go home and get clean. A few months later, I was accepted into a United Way-supported transitional housing program for men recovering from addiction. There were a lot of very strict rules, but I was being held accountable—maybe for the first time ever. I started doing everything I could do to avoid falling back into old habits, like volunteering at a community garden.

Now, I'm studying computer science at university and working part time at a local homeless shelter. I remember when I stayed at different shelters, I struggled to connect with the staff. But getting to work at the shelter gives me the opportunity to be that staff member who people connect with. It's been a very fulfilling experience—being able to identify with people and actually getting real with them when we talk.

When I was at my worst, I would walk down the street and people would pretend I wasn't there. Nowadays, people cross the street just to say hi to me.

I plan to finish my degree and I'm thinking about doing a master's. I'd also like to get more involved with the shelter system in my city.

I want people like me to know it can get better. There are always going to be people there for you—you just have to open up and allow them in." —Travis

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