



How trust can save a life: Allie's story

Allie's childhood was a nightmare.

She was sexually abused by multiple family members and when she told her parents, they didn't believe her. Instead, they labelled her the "problem child", excluded her from family activities and didn't let her leave the house. And when the abuse continued at holiday events in her home, they turned a blind eye.

At 11 years old, Allie began to act out. She skipped school and stopped eating. By 14, addiction and eating disorders had taken over her life. When she was 16, her parents kicked her out. She remembers feeling that she would rather "die quietly, alone" than accept help. After years of abuse, trusting anyone was out of the question.

But Allie is a survivor.

So she left her home province and boarded a bus to Toronto. After learning about Covenant House, she began to visit the drop-in centre for a warm meal and a respite from the streets. It was a dark time. Allie weighed 92 pounds, used drugs and alcohol and strictly controlled her food intake in an effort to cope with her trauma.

Between the ages of 16 and 24, Allie continued to use Covenant House services, living on the street and in shelters. She shifted back and forth between addictions and disordered eating and sometimes traded sex for money and food in an effort to support herself.

Throughout it all, Covenant House was a constant. With love and understanding, staff slowly helped Allie explore a healthy relationship with food and herself. Over time, with continuous, steady encouragement, Allie opened up to our support. Through small gestures such as staff providing a safe space and food in a way that felt dignified, Allie began to trust.

By her mid-twenties, Allie was ready to make a change. She stopped using drugs and began to seek support for her eating issues. She returned to school and her bright mind shone. This allowed her to quickly get her degree and work towards her goal of becoming a social worker. Her purpose in life was to continue to heal and help others do the same.

Today, Allie works with young people at a health centre. She is the happiest she's ever been. Although she acknowledges it is still a daily challenge, she has gained weight and is learning healthy ways of eating. Allie is finding her way to healing.

Note: To protect this youth's identity, we have used a stock photo at her request