

Coming Home

Mike lived his life on the streets, selling scraps to survive. Then a United Way drop-in centre helped him find a home

"Before I moved to the city, I mostly hung out in strip clubs, bars and pool halls. I got involved with drugs and just went wild. When I moved here, I wanted to start a new life.

On the street, I became an easygoing, loveable guy. I walked everywhere with a shopping cart and collected scrap. But it got to a point where I was getting older and couldn't walk around pushing carts. Plus, I was lonely—it's hard to be alone in a big city. If you don't have a place to go, you're a lost soul.

That's why, when a friend told me about a United Way drop-in centre that gives people a place to spend their time and find friendship, I decided to check it out.

My life is much better now. The drop-in centre staff helped me get sober and find an apartment. I got really lucky with this apartment. I've spent time on the streets in the winter and it's hard—every day, you have to hunt to find somewhere warm and safe to spend the night. You get to a certain point in your life where you've got to be warm.

I don't care who you are: Everyone deserves a chance to have a roof over their head. Now I have that. I even have a cat!

It's not only about housing. Coming to the drop-in centre has changed me. This place has become my community and my family—it means I don't have to spend all my time alone in my apartment. I think it's important to have places to go to as you get older. The drop-in centre has also helped me learn to cope with people who have their own problems and can be easily triggered. Now, others come to me when they want to talk about a problem. I'm helping people too.

My advice to others? Have compassion when you see people out there who have problems. Offer a few nice words instead of turning a blind eye. Who knows—by making somebody smile, maybe they'll make somebody else smile. And if everybody starts smiling, life gets better." — Mike