



A Voice for Homeless Youth: Janice's Story

When Janice first walked through our front door, she was overwhelmed. Like many young people experiencing homelessness, she felt exhausted from constantly seeking help on the streets.

Our kids tell us that, when you are homeless, you often feel invisible. Even when you try to look someone in the eyes, they look right through you. When you ask for help, no one seems to hear you. It's a heartbreaking and dehumanizing experience.

At Covenant House, we believe every young person deserves to be seen, heard, and loved. This is the message we try to immediately share with each kid who comes to our shelters.

"The first thing they said when I first came in was 'Are you hungry?' 'Do you need clothes?' 'Do you need to wash your clothes?' They didn't ask 'Why are you here?' or 'What happened?'" Janice reflects on her first memory of Covenant House.

As Janice settled into life at Covenant House,

she began to open up and discovered a world of possibilities she never would have dreamed of before.

While she shares that she is "not someone who likes to talk a lot," the support and love provided by our amazing friends like you gave Janice the courage to become a Youth Ambassador.

Our Youth Ambassadors represent the young people we serve. They speak out about youth homelessness, share their own stories, and encourage other kids just like them. "We're the voice of the youth," Janice says. "Who's better to voice our experiences than we are?"

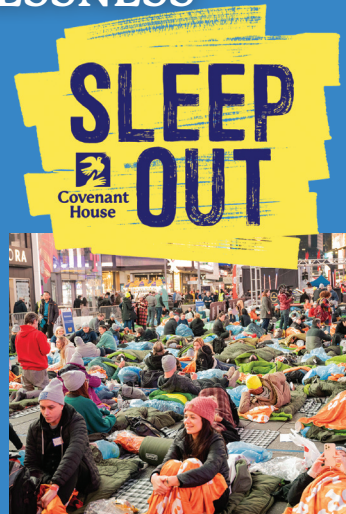
Today, Janice is at the start of the stable, independent life she has worked so hard for since arriving at Covenant House. She has completed EMT training and is on a path toward a career that aligns with her desire to help others. While every youth's story is just as unique as they are, we are proud to have Janice as a representative of the young people we serve.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Grab a sleeping bag and head outside for this year's Sleep Out!

Challenge your friends, family, and coworkers to join you or give a gift in support.

Join the movement to raise money and awareness for youth homelessness.



When: November 21–22

Where: Participate at your local Covenant House or in your own in your backyard!

<https://www.covenanthouse.org/sleepout>

Covenant House builds a bridge to hope for young people facing homelessness and survivors of trafficking through unconditional love, absolute respect, and relentless support. Our doors are open 24/7 in 34 cities across five countries, and our high-quality programs are designed to empower young people to rise and overcome adversity, today and in the future.

www.covenanthouse.org

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Open Doors

Covenant House: News from the inside

SUMMER 2024

When she escaped her traffickers, JJ found safety and healing at a Covenant House safe house. Despite the traumas she endured, our community gave her the love and respect she needed to move forward.

Reclaiming Her Voice: Your Love Gave JJ the Courage to Speak Out

Her life was in danger. When she needed a safe place to stay, JJ* found a Covenant House safe house.

Certain terrible, dangerous people were looking for her.

You see, JJ is a trafficking survivor. Like many young people who have escaped the sex trade, her life was still at risk. If JJ's traffickers found her, there is no telling what torture they would put her through.

It may surprise you, but of the thousands of young people who find safety and sanctuary at Covenant House in the U.S. and Canada, approximately 20% are survivors of human trafficking.

That's because the sex trade preys upon the most vulnerable. Youth experiencing homelessness

are especially targeted and have an even harder time breaking free because they rely so heavily on their traffickers.

When JJ finally left her abusers, we were a safe place she could run to. Because of your compassionate support, Covenant House is there to welcome every young person who walks through our doors. Through our actions and our words, we show every young person that they are important, valued, and their story matters.

"It was incredibly important to me that the staff at Covenant House believed and validated my experiences and did not degrade me, which happened when I tried to get help from other places," JJ shares.

The experience of human trafficking is complex and unique for each individual. Most victims aren't in chains, but have been manipulated

*JJ's name has been changed to protect her identity.

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In my many years at Covenant House, time and time again I have watched youth who were once overlooked and forgotten

rise above their circumstances and find their voice.

In this newsletter, you will read about some incredible young people you have helped. Young people who have become a voice for all youth experiencing homelessness and human trafficking.

Like JJ, who, even while living in a safe house to escape her traffickers, advocated for laws that will help survivors of the sex trade. And Janice, who has joined our Youth Ambassador program and is passionately educating others about the realities of youth homelessness.

I see true resilience in both of these young women. Once, they had no voice, no control over their lives. Now, they are the authors of their stories, using their empowered positions to help other kids just like them.

They show us the transformational power of your compassion. Your generosity is a message to every young person in our care. It says "You are seen. You are heard. You are valued."

Your love speaks volumes! Thank you for helping youth at Covenant House reclaim their voice.

William "Bill" Bedrossian
President and CEO



Today, JJ is speaking out on behalf of victims of human trafficking.

JJ's story cont.

From Survivor to Advocate

by their traffickers with violence, emotional coercion, and withholding of food and other essentials.

Despite all they have endured, many victims believe their traffickers love them. They believe they have no say in their lives and that they wouldn't survive without their abusers.

"Victims and survivors of trafficking and sexual abuse don't always have a voice, and if you can speak up for them, they will later be able to speak up for someone else," says JJ.

And she did just that. This courageous young girl interned with the advocacy department at one of our Covenant House locations, where she helped educate about human trafficking and prevention measures and advocate for laws that will improve the lives of survivors.

"I want people to know that we all have value, we are all human beings," JJ says. "At Covenant House, I am being treated with the respect and love that is helping me move forward."

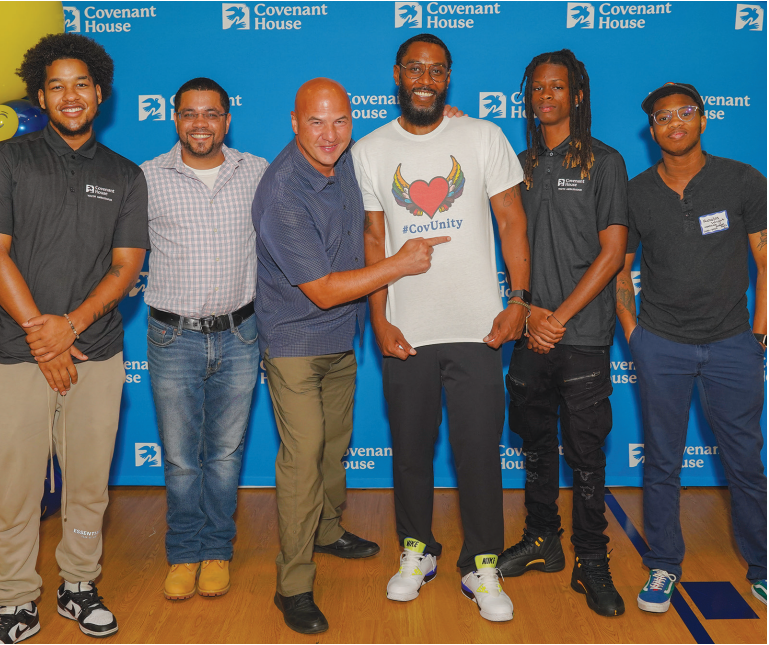
Recovery for survivors is long and complicated, and it takes the efforts of a lot of good people. People like JJ. People like you. Please take a stand with us today against human trafficking. Anything you give will support the rescue and recovery of youth survivors.

Making It and Giving Back

In 1986, Dom Gervasi was a teenager alone with no place to go. That's when he came to Covenant House. Years later, now a mature adult, Dom started Made in Brooklyn Tours. His tours blend Brooklyn's distinguished history with visits to creative people and small businesses "makin' it" in Brooklyn right now.

Once he found his footing, Dom reached out to Covenant House to learn how he could give back to the place that gave him a fresh start long ago. "For me, Covenant House became a stepping stone toward a better life," Dom says. Dom shares his story from when he was a young man unsure of himself and where life would lead him, to his life today as an entrepreneurial business owner and generous volunteer, to help make a difference in his community.

Last year, Dom participated as an alumni speaker at our Sleep Out. He feels it's important to use his resources and his voice to speak up on behalf of young people going through experiences similar to his as a young man. He remains active with Covenant House, helping in our fundraising efforts and even providing private tours for other alumni. Now that Dom is "makin' it," he is grateful for the opportunity to give back.



Dom (third from the left) and his generous volunteer work have helped make Covenant House the loving community it is today!

A Lifetime of Giving



One bright Sunday morning, Frances Michalec was walking through Central Park when a homeless young woman approached, asking for help. Frances was caught off guard, so she reacted without thinking, quickly answering, "No."

The girl politely accepted Frances' answer and walked away. It was a moment Frances will never forget. She felt guilty for not helping the young woman — so guilty that it took her a long time to even tell her husband, Jim, about the encounter.

Then one day, they received a letter from Covenant House asking for help. "This was my opportunity to make amends. I thought of the young woman in the park and that supporting the work of Covenant House could make a difference."

Since then, the Michalecs have lifted up hundreds of young people through their decades of support. They have even made a commitment to put Covenant House in their wills. "We thought it would be a great way to continue the support we started so many years ago," Jim says.

We are beyond grateful for the Michalecs for helping empower a generation of young people through a lifetime of generosity.