

# Debra's Story

Debra is a 55-year-old resident in Alpha House's Permanent-Supportive Housing program, Providence House. A new sober-living facility under Alpha House's Housing continuum of services, there has been a new wave of residents moving into Providence in the past 6 months. Individuals whose homelessness experience has ranged from 6 months to 8 years now call the building home. It is, as the residents will tell you, a mixed bag.

Housing, while being a significant positive in their journeys also comes with new challenges – sobriety, close-quarter neighbours, learning new skills, and facing past traumas., Debra will tell you she was one of the lucky ones – “I was only on the street for a short time compared to some others,” she says. But she did face a particularly significant challenge on the street: the loss of her vision. It was only once she was housed at Providence House that she was able to access an optometrist and undergo a corneal retinal replacement and cataract surgery. This helped preserve her vision, but only in one eye.

Debra doesn't dwell on the continued loss of vision in her other eye though. When asked about what she appreciates most about having a home, she wastes no time in saying, “It's all about the 3 S's: safety, security, and stability. I have all of those things at Providence.”

Her most specific recollection of being on the street was that “you don't have quiet time.” “[At Providence], I'm able to collect my thoughts and focus in a calm manner on my health,” she says.

We tell Debra about our Home for the Holidays campaign and ask what she was planning for the holidays, a notoriously difficult time for many. She trips over her words to tell us she is the biggest decorator in the building. One of her favourite contributions has been the felt snowman ornaments hung up on the communal bulletin boards.

This December, Debra has plans to start a Secret Santa gift exchange in the building and has also set her sights on making a Star Blanket. A traditional Indigenous craft, the Star Blanket symbolizes respect, honor, and admiration. The colors represent a person's personality, accomplishments, or story, and Debra envisions each resident having their own patch, creating a communal piece of symbolic art.

It's clear that Debra has become a cornerstone of the Providence community. She has positive things to say about everyone, including the neighbour who interjects to say, "no one has anything good to say about me."

"I do," she insists. "And you need to say good things about yourself too." Her tone suggests she isn't to be messed with, but she accompanies it with an affectionate punch to the arm. Providence is lucky to have Debra.