

Jeff's Story

Jeff's is a quiet man. He listens first – to our conversation with his neighbour Reagan before deciding whether he feels comfortable sharing about his own journey to Alpha House's Permanent Supportive Housing program, Providence House. His story is not for the faint of heart – it hasn't been easy for him. We learn that he's 55 but only because the conversation in the living room suddenly becomes a contest as to who is the oldest. Jeff ties for first. At 55 years old, he's adjusting to the stability he's been missing for nearly six years.

"I was homeless for 5 years," he tells us. "I lost most of my toes to frostbite and I was sleeping under a bridge most nights. Alpha House [he nods towards us] would stop by – the HELP Team" he clarifies, "and they would give me food and some supplies." Calgary's unforgiving winters left their mark even with social service agency's interventions. He had a wheelchair sometimes, he says, but not always. And sometimes he had to crawl to get around. A sobering image. No one should have to live like that.

Jeff eventually entered the Calgary Drop-In Center's Detox Program and was visited after a few days by Manager's from Providence House, Alpha House's Sober-Living supportive housing facility. His interview for the program went very well and this past May, after years of navigating life on the streets, Jeff moved into the building and gruffly he says, "I'm happy to be off the streets."

Life at Providence has given Jeff the tools and support to reclaim parts of his independence. With access to health resources, he received mobility aids that allowed him to walk again.

Far from an easy process, but the supports are finally easing pain that had plagued him for years and providing renewed opportunity for hobbies.

If you are someone swayed by physical stereotypes, you might not have pegged Jeff as a cooking lover, but he's already got plans for helping to prepare the turkey dinner over the holidays. "I like to make lots of meals, fries or steak or pork chops," he says with a rare smile. TV is another new pastime. His favourite show right now: Prison Break.

The holidays haven't recently been a time of celebration for Jeff. He remembers good times when his family was alive, but most have passed on and he's lost touch with others. But this year we hope things can be different for Jeff. Surrounded by friends in the Providence building, he says he's looking forward to the holidays, "to spend time with friends, eat good food. That will be good."