

University of Groningen

Streetfront

van Hoven, Bettina; Bolt, Ryan; Hoogers, Charlotte; Gross Valle, Candelas; Valentini, Nina; van den Brom, Yuna; van Hoven, Bettina; Ainscough, Jacob; O'Sidhe, Yara; Stokes, Trevor

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2022

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van Hoven, B. (Ed.), Bolt, R., Hoogers, C., Gross Valle, C., Valentini, N., van den Brom, Y., van Hoven, B., Ainscough, J., O'Sidhe, Y., Stokes, T., & Lebedieva, A. (2022). *Streetfront: Stories about Perseverance, Resilience and Running in the Downtown Eastside*.

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STREETFRONT



**Stories about Perseverance, Resilience,
and Running in the Downtown Eastside**

"I think that's what [Streetfront is] about; we offer a respite from a cruel world where they don't feel satisfied or respected. And I think what we do is that we turn it on its ear and say, if you respect yourself and if you respect your abilities and if you believe in yourself and you believe that you're capable, everything else will be gravy. Because really, that's all that matters." - Trevor Stokes (Head teacher at Streetfront)

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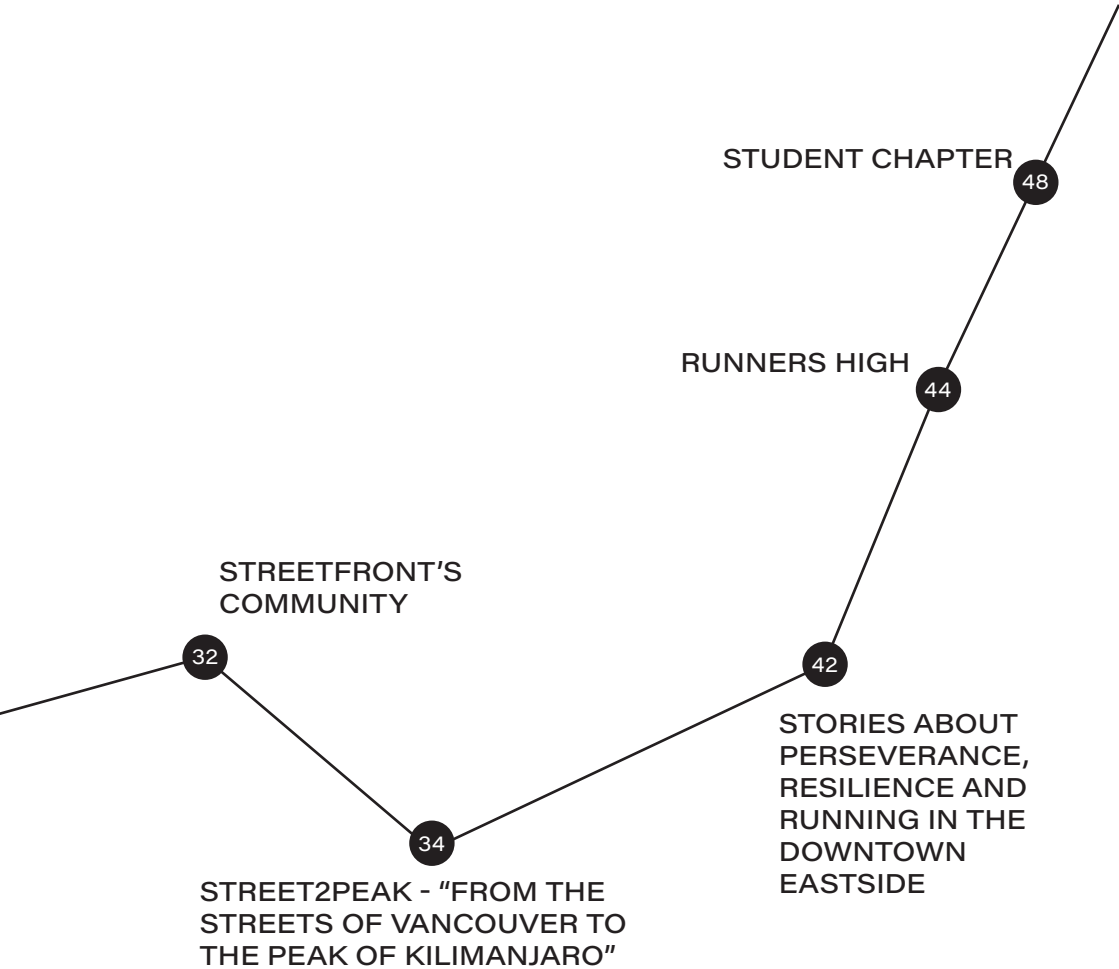


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PROLOGUE

We met Trevor Stokes through an online guest lecture as part of the University of Groningen Honours College Summer School ‘Diversity, Encounter and Inclusion in the Urban Context’ in the summer of 2021. In the course, we talked to city planners, social workers, and academics, all working to make Vancouver a more livable place. Trevor, however, was different. He humbly introduced himself as ‘just a high school teacher’ and felt out of place in our program filled with academics. Yet within an hour, he gave a talk that left us speechless. He gave us a glimpse into the reality of Streetfront (an alternative education program located in Vancouver East) and what it means to be teaching the world’s largest group of high school marathon runners. He told us the stories of how through running, his students were able to overcome traumatic experiences in their past, how they grew, and how they started to believe in themselves. He told us stories about loss, about students much younger than ourselves going through hardships we could never imagine but picking themselves up and starting over. Trevor told us about the impact Streetfront has on the lives of the students who attend. Trevor explained:

“I can’t change the external. I can’t go to their homes and make it safer, I can’t necessarily stop their parents from fighting, I can’t stop their brothers from being addicted to drugs, but what I can do is for the six, seven hours that they are in my care, I can teach them how to be independent, strong, resilient and give them the tools that I think they can use to be successful in any aspect of their lives.”

Trevor told us Willy's story, who was once a shy kid who sat in class completely silent with a hood pulled over his head, but turned into a bubbly person who is now married and just had a son. He told us the stories of students who have 55,000 steps to give up during a marathon but never do, even though they would have all the reasons to. When Trevor spoke, he sounded down-to-earth, humble, and never condescending. He made it sound like the students' accomplishments were exceptional but gave you the feeling that this journey was possible for everyone if you believed in yourself and if you had the proper support.

When he finished his talk, we were left in awe. We were impressed, and inspired. We had just gotten a glimpse into a world in which greatness only comes from standing together and trusting each other. We learned that with a solid ground to stand on, the heights you can reach are endless, and so much more is possible. We were left in awe by the students, their achievements, and their outlook on life. And we wanted others to have this eye-opening experience too.

We wanted to know more about the students' stories; we wanted to join Trevor in celebrating them and share them with as many people as possible, to ensure that the legacy of Streetfront can continue to inspire others. We contacted and interviewed twelve students and the three teachers about themselves and their experiences at Streetfront. In the remainder of this book, you will read about them; their stories, and their words.

Ryan, Charlotte, Candelas, Nina, Yuna
July 2022

INTRODUCTION

“I think Streetfront is an opportunity to put a mirror up to yourself and say, are you able and are you capable? I say this to the kids probably once a week. I can’t change the fact that they’re poor, I can’t change that their parents might be addicted, I can’t change almost anything. What I can change is what they see in front of them when they look into that mirror.”

Trevor Lanes Stokes (headteacher at Streetfront, Vancouver)

In 1977, outdoor enthusiasts John Jordan and Bill McMillan had an idea. Instead of bringing students into the classroom, why not bring the classroom to them? Instead of enclosing themselves and their students within concrete walls, shut off from the world for the better part of the day, why not take the classroom outside, be closer to nature and the real world? The idea of Streetfront, an outdoor education program teaching students school and life lessons based on physical education, was born.

John and Bill started by recruiting students from the streets of the Downtown Eastside, driving around, asking children working on the streets whether they would like to go to school as part of their day. John assumed the teaching role, Bill the one of a Youth and Family worker, supporting the students in navigating the challenges life threw at them. They started giving lessons, and took the students for runs multiple times a week. The classroom was literally the street front. Fast forward a couple of years, and Streetfront had become an established institution. The school was taken under the wing of Britannia Secondary School, was allocated a portable on the grounds of the high school, and a close cooperation between the two schools has existed ever since.

It was 1999, when Trevor Stokes entered the picture as the first of Streetfront's three current staff members. At the point of quitting his teaching career, he was allocated to the school as a substitute teacher, and found what he had been missing in his career previously – a small, independent school, a hidden gem with a myriad of opportunities for change. Liz Holmes, working for Britannia Secondary School, notified Trevor when the position he only previously substituted for, became vacant. Trevor applied, and got the job. Barry Skillin joined in 2003 as a student support worker, and is now coordinating the group's outdoor activities. Gord Howey, a youth and family worker, was brought on board in the same year. The three of them started building on the foundations set by John and Bill, but also initiated numerous adaptations of their own.

Now, Streetfront is an alternative school in East Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, that focuses on character development through physical activity. The students who attend the school come to Streetfront with their own histories. As you will read later, these histories are closely connected to the structural issues present in the Downtown Eastside, once referred to as “Canada's poorest postal code.” Some of the students come from a background of poverty, some have gone through homelessness and/or foster care, others have experienced alcohol and/or drug abuse themselves or in their families.

By pushing beyond the challenges life has thrown at them, however, the students of Streetfront have also shown resilience, mental toughness and the ability to take risks. Streetfront's approach to education is one dedicated to helping its students become more resilient, and gain (self-)respect. The school does this through placing a large emphasis on physical activity, be it physical education (PE) classes, running three times a week or participating in marathons. The idea that physical perseverance and mental strength go hand in hand is fundamental to what Streetfront stands for, and has radically changed the lives of many of its students.

It is these students that form the center of the book you are holding in your hands. Through interviews, we collected their stories, and listened to how Streetfront helped them make a change in their lives. We aim to retell those stories, celebrate them, and spread the word.

In addition to focusing on the stories of individual students, we also want to show that Streetfront is more than just an alternative education program based on running to motivate students. We want to highlight how Streetfront is a community, or even a family for many students; A support system that, at the same time, challenges youths to be better and work harder. It is exactly this unique community that every person we talked to mentioned about Streetfront.

In the words of Yara O'Sidhe, a former student:

“I honestly think that there has not been a better school created. The community that is created there. Every single person that has ever attended Streetfront that I know has always said, ‘I wish I could go back to that time. I wish I could be in that portable with those people.’ Because you are so held. I don’t know what it is and how they make it that way. Every single classroom, every single year, no matter what students are there, such a family is created through that. And I think that happens with sports teams. But, still, there is something about [us] all having this hardship in common, having that community and that circle and family and then achieving such highs together, such beautiful achievements in a community that way and cheering each other on, having those running buddies, having those conversations on the runs.”

Yara's quote brings out many of the aspects that will be central to the following chapters in this book. You will read about Streetfront as a community, the individual students' personal journeys within that community, and how learning to push through hardships, has impacted the students; be it making it through a five kilometer run without stopping, running a marathon without giving up, or tackling their own, very personal hardships in life.

To gain some understanding of the context and challenges in which the Streetfront program and its students are placed, we first provide you with some background information of the Vancouver neighborhood in which Streetfront is located as well as a brief historical context that is meant to help explain some of the complex problems that make up everyday life in East Vancouver, and therefore are a part of the Streetfront community. Then, we describe Streetfront, what the school stands for, what the program is like, and how that affected the students attending the school, and growing up in Vancouver East. We also give you a glimpse of the daily life of a Streetfront student, introduce the teachers and the community that Streetfront is, before we move on to the individual stories of the students that comprise the heart of this book. In those chapters, the students share what they experienced and how Streetfront gave them the tools to become the person they are today.

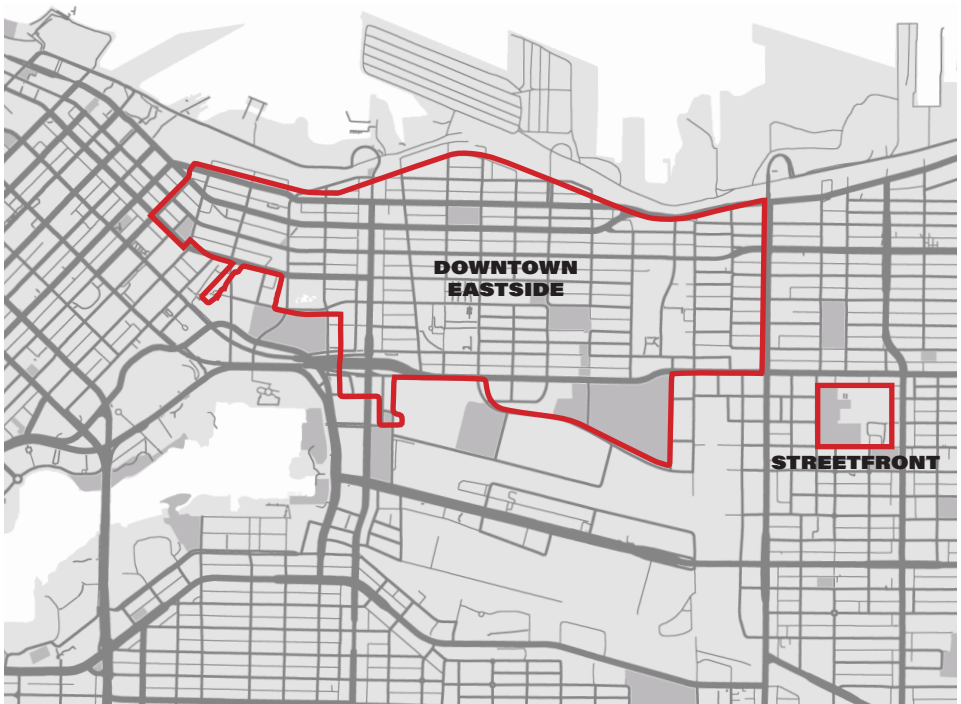
“YOU ARE HERE”

“If they’re not willing to try, I know where they’ll end up, and it’s the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. You probably have your own parts of your own communities that are probably equally rough. That’s where many of them will end up if we don’t intervene. And I think it’s imperative, and so why does Streetfront exist? I think it’s a necessary opportunity to show kids that you are capable, and we believe in you.” - Trevor Stokes

If you are from outside Vancouver, you are at a disadvantage when it comes to knowing about the complex social issues faced by people in the Downtown Eastside (DTES), and you may never have an opportunity to travel there or meet people firsthand. Google Downtown Eastside, scroll past the hotel recommendations, and you will probably find stories that are based on negative stereotypes about both the place and its residents, some of which may cause you to disapprove of or fear the neighborhood. The complex set of social issues it experiences include high rates of mental illness, poverty, crime, homelessness, and (murdered and missing) sex workers, for all of which the DTES has become notorious throughout North America.

Many kids that ‘run with Streetfront’ have experienced this. In this book, in the stories by the students, you will read about youths who have been in the foster care system, youths struggling with drug and alcohol abuse, or who encounter it in their families. While we cannot do justice to the complicated history that has caused many of the social problems the youths in this book face, our aim is to provide at least some context that will help you understand and appreciate better some of the statements and experiences you read in the book. This book is intended to contribute to see past the stereotypes, and young people’s resilience, perseverance, and community. To understand just how remarkable both the alternative education program at Streetfront as well as the stories of the youths are, it makes sense to learn more about the geographic and social context in which that happens.

Vancouver has the third-largest urban Indigenous population in Canada, and the DTES accommodates the largest share of Indigenous people compared to other neighborhoods. There is a complex colonial history that is continued into the present, and what we learn about the DTES, Streetfront, and the stories of its youth cannot be disconnected from that. While the text before you is not short, the information in it is very relevant and important, and some of the nuances we offer are too often ignored.



The City of Vancouver's local planning area for the Downtown Eastside includes the areas of Victory Square, Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona, Oppenheimer, and Thornton Park.

Vancouver's colonial past and present

For the unfamiliar reader, it is important to learn a little bit about colonial land dispossession as it is inextricably related to what we observe in the DTES today. What we now call the Downtown Eastside and regard as one of the oldest neighborhoods in Vancouver, actually has a human history that precedes European colonization and settlement by more than 10,000 years. The x^wməθk^wəy^əm (Musqueam), Skw^xwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) people are the original inhabitants of what is now known as Vancouver. This territory was never given up to the Government of Canada by its Indigenous population. Unlike in other provinces in Canada, Indigenous people here did not give rights to their land to white European settlers: Vancouver is located on unceded, ancestral Coast Salish territory. It can be considered stolen land.

When white Europeans settled in Canada, they believed themselves to be superior to Indigenous people, and some did not even consider Indigenous people to be human at all. They would have regarded the land as 'unowned and empty'. As a result, Europeans felt it was within their right to make decisions without consultation or consent. In 1876, the Indian Act helped the government in their mission to assimilate Indigenous people by undoing Indigenous laws and government, and outlawing cultural and economic practices, ceremonial objects and language, and establishing 'Indian reserves' and 'Indian Residential Schools'. The 'Indian Residential Schools' were largely run by Christian churches and more than 150,000 Indigenous children attended these schools. As a part of the European assimilation strategy, children were forcefully removed from their villages and separated from their parents and any Indigenous influence. Any connection to Indigenous language or culture was forbidden, children's personal clothing was taken and their hair cut. The majority of these children suffered from neglect, malnutrition, untreated diseases, and physical, mental and sexual abuse. An estimated 40% of children died as a result of these, committed suicide or died trying to run away. The Indian Residential Schools were said to aim at "Killing the Indian in the child". The last residential school closed in 1996. Children who left these schools are now often referred to as residential school survivors.

The effect of the European assimilation strategy on Indigenous communities included the widespread eradication of Indigenous roots in the form of language and culture, as well as knowledge and skills to raise families. To this day, many Indigenous communities suffer from lack of resources (including access to housing, (clean) water, health care and education) and poverty, and they see high numbers of youth suicides, teenage pregnancies, and substance abuse problems. A relatively large number of children are still removed from their family and community through placement in the foster care system.

It has been widely recognised by now that the European colonial system has been causing widespread and varied hardships, including poverty, mental and physical health problems that have lasted multiple generations and continue until the present day. Youths nowadays have to overcome many social and economic barriers to break (out of) this cycle.

The Downtown Eastside

British Columbia's economy was founded on resource economy and in the late 19th century the DTES was an important residential area for people working along the coast and returning to Vancouver for short periods of time, living in hotels. As a result of the presence of these workers, many bars were established in the neighborhood and alcohol and drug use were common. But from the late 1950s the area de-industrialised and many workers (clients) moved away. The city of Vancouver established a new center and moved main facilities as well as closed down the streetcars, effectively beginning to marginalize the community. In the 1980s, the face of the DTES changed again with the establishment of a multitude of second-hand stores and pawn shops, which were related to the increase in illegal drug-use and resulting theft to finance drugs. Not much later, the main department store Woodward's and neighboring businesses closed their doors.

The Downtown Eastside now is a diverse neighborhood and home to many different population groups including a large share of Indigenous people both from this area and beyond (almost 10%) as well as new immigrants including refugees. In the DTES now, there is a relatively large number of men, low-income families and single persons who have been unemployed for some time. Unemployment rates are around 20% and the annual income on average consists of 12,000 Canadian Dollars (which is about 10% of the average income for Vancouver and one-third of what is considered a liveable salary). Of the residents in the DTES, 67% are considered low-income and 40% rely on welfare or disability payments. In addition, there is a housing crisis because of unsafe and unhealthy living conditions, conversion and demolition of low-income housing, exploitation and homelessness. There is also a health crisis evident by the number of deaths from drug overdose and the high rate of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C infection. Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by the social issues described above as they continue to experience systemic and structural racism resulting from colonialism.

While the DTES represents an extreme case of a long-standing politics of oppression, exclusion and urban marginalization, and some would say “abandonment”, it is important to emphasize that the DTES is also a neighborhood showing remarkable resilience, social cohesion, community development, cultural and creative expression and a large number of non-profit organizations. The potential of the DTES for successful (Indigenous) resistance and community activism, and for transformation certainly deserve more attention.

As we show in the following chapters, Streetfront is an example of exactly this potential of perseverance, community and resilience... through running.

An alternative school

“If I was going to tell you what Streetfront is, it’s an alternative school with an alternative meaning. It’s different from a traditional delivery of academics and whatever someone’s high school experience is. It’s an investment of belief, confidence, and hope. And the idea that if we work hard, we can achieve anything.” - Trevor Stokes

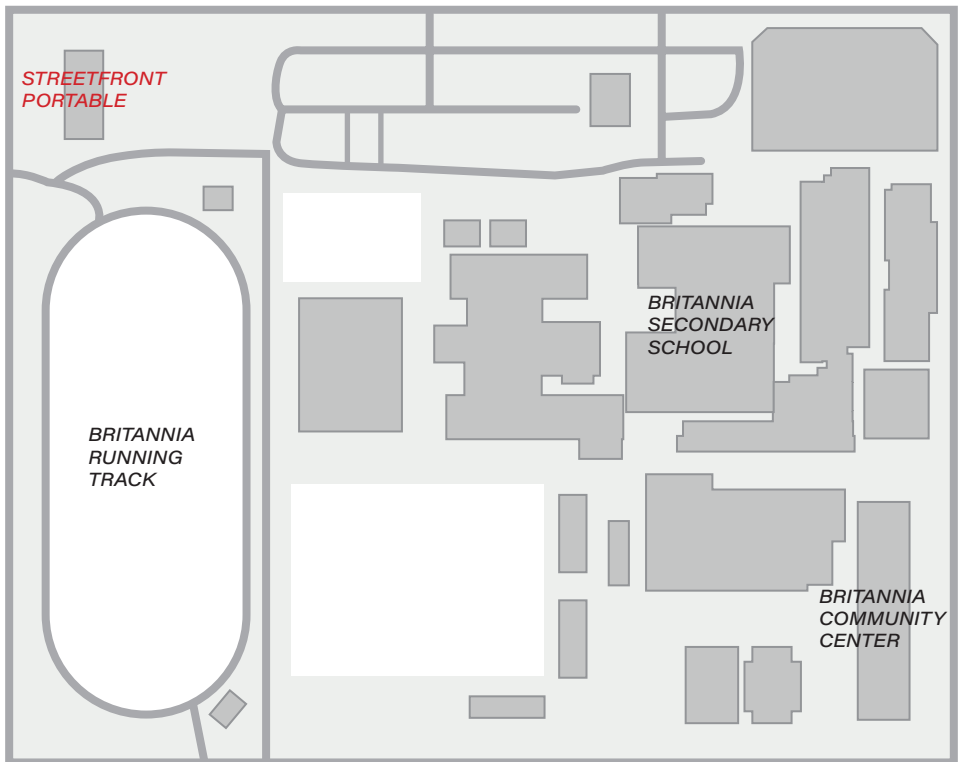
Just at the edge of Britannia Community Services Center lies the Streetfront portable that about twenty students call their school. Britannia Community Services Center is a seven-hectare location in East Vancouver, just outside the boundaries of the Downtown Eastside. Britannia includes a community center, childcare, public library, youth center, swimming pool, ice rink, public schools, an Indigenous garden, and the ʂxʷqʷeləwən carving center.

Streetfront offers an alternative education program. Many readers outside Canada may not be familiar with such a program, therefore we offer a brief explanation. According to the BC government, alternative education programs recognise that students may experience factors hindering their progress in regular schools. Alternative programs offer small class sizes, enhanced counseling services and are more student-centered. They intend to help students address social and emotional issues. Alternative programs have a large share of children and youth, considered vulnerable, or ‘at-risk’. They come from disadvantaged social, cultural, economic, mental, and physical health backgrounds. The alternative education program is intended to provide opportunities for these students to experience success.

For Streetfront, too, this is the case as Gord Howey, one of the teachers, explains:

“Our goal is to take kids who have very low self-esteem, who have had trouble with drugs and alcohol, with truancy, and family situations that are not so good, to build them back up again, and hopefully move them on into a mainstream school after they leave us.”

However, in British Columbia, in many cases, students considered vulnerable have unreasonably been held back, removed from regular schools, and instead placed in alternative education. According to a report to the government of BC in 2021, many Indigenous students experienced discriminatory and systemically racist practices leading to a lack of trust and even a ‘culture of fear’. The Vancouver School Board has acknowledged that such practices exist, and they have started to promote policies and practices to foster more safe and compassionate schools.



Teachers at Streetfront also find that alternative school programs rather cater to students where mainstream schools have failed them. And just as students experience prejudice, Trevor recounts that alternative education programs are altogether often rejected. People believe them to be inferior, their teachers less skilled educators because they are working with “struggling youth”. Trevor tells us:

“We were kind of pushed to the side. So this marginalization of people in society, we were seeing it in the education system.”

All alternative programs across the board, Trevor feels, have been allocated in **“ratty portables, they were in basements. Basements without windows. They were in places where you would literally shun people almost like you didn’t want them in the general population.”**

The looks of Streetfront might not be what one imagines when thinking about a school - located in a portable, a “trailer on wheels” - across an outdoor sports area, connected to Britannia Secondary School. Streetfront is small with just two classrooms, a hallway, and a bathroom. Trevor says:

“If space defines existence, someone is sending a very clear message that my students aren’t worth much. I have been in the same ratty portable for 21 years. Most people wouldn’t want to teach in it; I love it. [...] Definitely, there is a neglect to not only the facilities but also the ability to support these kids.”

But when we video-call with the teachers, we see walls covered in pictures – a group of teenagers waving at the camera on top of a mountain. As we find out later, this is not just any mountain. It is Kilimanjaro, the highest freestanding mountain in Africa. The group of youths is not just any random student collection, they are students from Streetfront. There are also posters of rappers, Che Guevara, and Mahatma Gandhi. On the outside, students have painted the trailer and built a small garden: it feels homey. One of the teachers, Barry Skillin, explains:

“It’s a very busy place. We’ve got students’ artwork on the walls and stickers on our doors and things like that. It’s a colorful place.”

Around twenty students between the ages of 13 to 16 as well as three staff members make Streetfront what it is. From grades 8-10 Trevor, Gord and Barry teach these students: Gord as the Youth and Family worker, Barry as the students’ support worker, and Trevor as the main teacher. Jericho Cowell, a former student at Streetfront, shares his experience with Trevor, Gord, and Barry:

“Trevor and I always had a relationship that was based upon him mentoring me. Barry always has the information you need when you’re on the trail, whenever you’re out hiking. But also because he’s not the main educator I always had a little bit more of a friendly relationship with Barry. I think he gave me a little bit of slack. He kind of trusted me that I wouldn’t push out if he gave me some room. I always felt like Barry trusted me. And Gord was always watching out to make sure that I wasn’t doing anything I wasn’t supposed to be doing. Because that’s what Gord’s there to do. He is also someone you can go to when you want to talk about something that you don’t want to talk to other people about. Someone will definitely always have your back.”

Jericho's words resonate with Trevor's teaching philosophy, Trevor says: **"If anybody was going to define my teaching style, for sure, it would be student-centered. You know it's not me in the center of the universe, it's the students."**

Many, if not most of the students that attend Streetfront are commonly defined as at-risk. The term 'at-risk youths' has received much criticism. 'At-risk' youth are often viewed as those experiencing substance abuse, school failure, juvenile delinquency, and mental health disorders. Such a term reduces students to risk factors and problematic outcomes, ignoring their capabilities to develop behavior and resilience. A simple solution has been proposed as well: to simply define students as students.

Certainly, for Trevor, the term is at least misleading. Yes, many students at Streetfront have experienced social, emotional, institutional, and/or generational traumas. They have dealt with family issues, homelessness, assault, and/or drug addiction. But using the term at-risk reduces every single student to a single word incapable of encompassing their story. Trevor explains that it is a term that already assumes the worst. He says:

"Our youth are insecure; they are called at-risk youth but they are not 'at risk'. They are the most risk-averse students and it's because they have been judged. Their history is almost always in front of them. And they can't get out of that, so they want to have this protective shell to prevent exposure to harsh criticism."

At Streetfront, the teachers are faced with the "immediate needs of the students." Immediate needs that frequently lead to people lowering their expectations for them. There is always something to address and few people expect big achievements if any at all. These kids have not been encouraged to challenge themselves, to see what they are capable of. The bar is often set so low that parents are just happy that they are going to school and not causing trouble.

Streetfront teachers, though, do not view the students as victims of their pasts. While introducing the students of Streetfront to us during an interview, Trevor says: “It doesn’t matter where they come from, it matters where they are going”. But the past does matter and the teachers speak of the need to restore trust in teenagers who have spent their entire lives learning to distrust the world around them. Barry, Gord, and Trevor address this as follows:

“You can’t have success in academics, you can’t have a possible impact on their choices that they make outside of school, without building on relationships first. So, education, in many ways, takes a bit of a backseat. When they come to us, we first build our relationship with them so that they trust us because trust is a big, as you know, trust is a huge issue for anybody, let alone these kids that have received so much damage in their life. And so build on that. And then we can deal with that.” – Barry

“We want to take that broken kid who has come in with a lot of issues. We want to build them back up again with self-confidence, helping them find passion, whether it be in a sport or an activity. Or maybe it’s on the academic side of things, too. So that’s what we want to do, we want to take those kids and make them feel better and give them the skills that they need.” – Gord

“My job is to not allow these kids to accept low expectations. It’s to raise them and expand things. You name it, I teach it and I teach it because I know these kids can learn and understand the concepts [...] If I make things too easy, and I allow that just by showing up you succeed, I haven’t done enough. Because these kids need investment in who they are. And I needed to raise the bar because people have always been lowering and lowering the bar for them.” – Trevor

MUCH MORE THAN TEACHERS

Trev, Barry, and Gordy,

These men wake up every day with their hearts and souls full of passion and intention to help, serve, support, and save the lives of each kid that walks through that door. Getting kids from the streets of the East Side to the tops of mountains across the world, Kilimanjaro, New Zealand - Rees-Dart Trail, Africa, etc, is something beyond incredible, it's almost unbelievable.

Giving each kid true friendship and kinship, showing and giving each kid support, resonance, and best of all, a soccer ball to kick as hard as they can, a team to play with, a community to rely on, to fall back on, depend on.

Each of these men plays an equal role in teaching us the ability to gain control of core-driven energy, and deliver way beyond what we think is "the best of our ability". Each of these men has the most amusing jokes you will ever hear, the most honest presence you will ever feel, and the most treasured knowledge you will ever be gifted with.

As kids on the East Side, life is a battle, usually, it's a fight for life itself every day. So to have a space to be comical about the bs of life was so replenishing. To tease one another about it all, and create a lightness in life and in every day, personality, was so healing. To have your confidants and instructors playing right there with you, teasing the bs out of you.

I can't speak for others, but that was such a blessing at that time of my life. There is something so encouraging and life-changing about having that energy as a part of a life that feels so morbidly crippling.

Laughter is our greatest medicine. Thank you for making us kids laugh every day.

Thank you for always having the map in hand, for always knowing where is north, where we are headed, how long our trails are, how difficult they are, and for always leading the way with confidence and grace.

Thank you for staying so calm, collected, grounded, and invested.

Thank you for always being able to talk, ask questions and invest time into what was going on behind the scenes.

Thank you for understanding each kid in their authenticity and individuality.

Thank you for never missing one run, for running on crutches, and for running to the very back of every marathon to cross the finish line with the very last kid running.

Thank you for including such incredible books in our courses.

Thank you for always having hundreds of hiking boots, jackets, snow pants, and backpacks for us to use.

Thank you for teaching me how to play every sport with fire and passion.

Thank you for feeding all the kids that walk through that door.

Thank you for teaching, guiding, and loving each kid that walks through that door.

By Yara O'Sidhe, a former Streetfront student



From left to right: **Trevor Stokes (53)**
At Streetfront since 1999

Gord Howey (59)
At Streetfront since 2003

Barry Skillin (57)
At Streetfront since 2003

STREETFRONT'S PROGRAM

A WEEK AT STREETFRONT

School takes place from 09:00 am until 03:00 pm every day.

One day is divided into 5 blocks, each lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

BLOCK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1	Physical Education Basketball/ Soccer/ Softball Britannia Gym	Physical Education Basketball/ Soccer/ Softball Britannia Gym	Physical Education Basketball/ Soccer/ Softball Britannia Gym	Physical Education Basketball/ Soccer/ Softball Britannia Gym	Physical Education Basketball/ Soccer/ Softball Britannia Gym
2	Nutritional Break STFT portable Running 5-10k Streetfront Neighborhood	Nutritional Break STFT portable Academics Streetfront Portable	Nutritional Break STFT portable Running 5-10k Streetfront Neighborhood	Nutritional Break STFT portable Academics Streetfront Portable	Nutritional Break STFT portable Running 5-10k Streetfront Neighborhood
3	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Skiing/ Snowshoeing/ Hiking	Academics Streetfront Portable
4	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Skiing/ Snowshoeing/ Hiking	Academics Streetfront Portable
5	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Maths/ English/ Science/ History/ Social Science Streetfront Portable	Academics Skiing/ Snowshoeing/ Hiking	Academics Streetfront Portable
5	Flexible Block Work/ Homework/ Cleanup	Flexible Block Work/ Homework/ Cleanup	Flexible Block Work/ Homework/ Cleanup	Outdoor Activity Skiing/ Snowshoeing/ Hiking	Flexible Block Work/ Homework/ Cleanup

Running

"I just was so used to not being good enough. And the one thing I was good at was running, it was something I could do by myself, it was something I just didn't have to rely on anybody for." - Gage

Academics

"Trevor [...] doesn't teach from textbooks. You'll have one textbook, because we have students potentially up to three years, because we're grades eight, nine and ten. Trevor has a rotation in, say, science, he'll have a rotation that every three years he'll cover the same material again. And so he'll have an overhead projector. And he'll write down the notes by hand, discuss them while he's doing it, the kids copy those down into their notebook. So Trevor creates a textbook right in front of them. So he can go through the textbook, and just give the information that he feels is the most pertinent. And then get rid of all the fluff, all the stuff that doesn't really mean as much. And so our students don't sit down with a textbook and then work independently on that. It's teacher-led, and then teacher-supported and other staff support when it comes time to do the assignments." - Barry

Physical Education

"Well, for me, as a kid who's super hyperactive, it really helped me be able to focus and sit at my desk and listen, just starting our day with a PE class and getting that morning energy out for a bit. So you can just sit down and actually listen to somebody and try to retain some information, instead of just, you know, just sitting in your seat wanting to do something else." - Jericho

Outdoor Activity

"We try and offer a whole number of activities to the kids and hopefully something sticks. And they might be passionate about one of those things." - Gord

Academics

"I think Trevor did a really good job taking the criteria for what we learned. I remember reading this book 'To Hell and Back! It's actually, about someone from the east side that got super tangled up in Hells Angels and all that, and then turned his life around and turned, created a self defense kind of organization called Yo Bro, Yo, Girl. And that's something that we also for a portion of the year had in Streetfront. So super inspiring books. Trevor was really good at picking that and then studying those books." - Yara

The active-based pedagogy at Streetfront results in a program that contains 60% physical exercise (PE) and 40% academics. Every single day starts off with PE. The teachers explain that PE is not a highly structured class, but it gives students the option to “**just be in the moment, and get the heart rate up, gets everyone active.**” If someone shows up late, it will not affect them academically.

An important ingredient of the Streetfront teaching philosophy is that every single staff member will participate in those PE classes, a representation of how they are as teachers. Trevor and Gord tell us:

“Every single PE, the three of us are immersed, embedded in that activity, and that is all through the entire aspect of what we do in Streetfront. So there has never been an art project, a marimba class, or a run that the three of us have not participated in. And that is a very unique piece because we never give the kids the opportunity to say: ‘Well, why aren’t you doing this?’” – Trevor

“We try to do everything that we ask the kids to do. And that’s huge because in a regular school, you might have a PE teacher that has a clipboard, and they’re doing check marks off as the kids are running around the track. Well, we do everything that we ask the kids to do, right? We’re in the classroom, we’re doing the academics, we’re on the run with them. So we try to be one of them. And sometimes we try to be a little bit better, if we can, in hopes that they’re gonna aspire to do the same” – Gord

Compared to the Streetfront from 1977, the first big change occurred in the running program. They kept the mandatory run three times a week, but instead of only having the children run, making it seem more like a punishment than anything else, the teachers went on the runs with their students and they committed to engaging in every activity asked of the students.

Running became an essential part of the Streetfront program but the year 2000 was the start of something big(ger), when a student, Mauricio Garcia, suggested to Trevor that Streetfront should participate in the Sun Run, Vancouver's annual 10k race. Trevor liked the idea of giving the students a sense of accomplishment, however, a 10k 'would not cut it'. What the students needed was something they could look back upon twenty years after graduating, smiling and saying 'I was one of the only high school students in the world that did it'. What they needed was a marathon. In 2000, Streetfront's first student ran the Seattle marathon. He was 14 years old.

At Streetfront the conviction is that running forces the students to deal with the pain and the challenges of their past and present lives. It is a way to encourage them to face and overcome obstacles, and to gain trust and self-confidence. Trevor explains:

"In your high schools, you'll find one kid that ran a marathon. Well, I got hundreds, you know, and they don't look like your friends. They don't look like my friends, they're the most unique subgroup of people on the planet, for doing what they're doing. The only reason they're doing it, is because someone told them; 'Are you tough enough to do this? Are you capable? Can you do this?' and 'I believe in you, I'll run right beside you if need be, but we can do this.'" He continues: "[Running] was about self-expression. It was about mental toughness. It was about independence, perseverance, and commitment. Those became the mantras of what the school was about. Everything that we felt the kids needed to be successful was found in the running program."

Through running marathons, the students learn that hard work leads to success and that they are capable of achieving admirable feats. They need self-confidence, care, and that push to make them believe in themselves. Running a marathon forces them to take a risk, a leap of faith that puts them in an uncomfortable position. An uncomfortable position that will allow change to take place. As an essential part of that, Trevor also emphasizes the important **“meditative quality to the idea of being alone and having to work your own issues”**. Unlike football or basketball, there is no ball to distract you, you are left alone with your thoughts. Thoughts that need to be confronted. Trevor further explains that in a marathon **“there are 55,000 strides, so the students have to think 55,000 times if they want to follow through or not”**.

At Streetfront the conviction is that running forces the students to deal with the pain and the challenges. It is a way to encourage them to face and overcome obstacles. Gord shares what running teaches the students:

“It teaches them perseverance, it teaches them that they can accomplish a tremendous physical feat that no other kids in Canada or the world are doing. At this age. I think our youngest marathon ever had just turned 13 years old, and he ran a full marathon down in Seattle one year.”

Streetfront is a unique program that creates a community through running that allows for youths to grow. A growth that is strengthened through values taught through running. Trevor defined them as energy, commitment, inertia, dedication, high standards, mental toughness, independence, perseverance, and the ability to take risks. And every single student interviewed not only recognized these but also directly knew how Streetfront, running and the teachers have helped incorporate them. They were present not only during their time in Streetfront but also still in their lives today.



STREETFRONT'S COMMUNITY

"Movement is power, mobility is power, a harnessing of energy, and a vessel of expression. It is an expansion of self and a continuation of self-essence, intelligence, and commitment. Commitment to self and to this life.

As a wild, angry, sad, confused, beat up, and broken teenager, Streetfront was the place where I was given a space to be just that. No one told me to be something else. I was given a place where I was allowed and encouraged to put all of that bottled-up scarcity into a form of expression through running. Through each day being told I can do it, and time and time again, my body proved my mind wrong, that I could do it.

Trevor always said your mind will stop you before your body will, that your body can keep going for long after your mind thinks it can. Of course, as a beat-up teenager, I never believed it. But, when I got out on the pavement and started running, it was just that. My body took over. All of a sudden, the rage I carried, the confusion I felt, and the inner battles became my fuel, my energy. I was merely the vessel for expressing it. Each time I got out and ran, my legs would ache in excitement at the thought of giving up, and my mind would plead, but my body kept going, and I'd look over and see my classmates with their heels kicked up so damn high (Ryan Wesaquate), and I'd keep going. I'd get a little faster. I'd go a little further.



It's like my body would beat my brain. All of a sudden, I had moved forward physically and mentally, changed my course, moving beyond the pain and beyond the stagnance. I had moved forward in more ways than just by the act of running. The more I ran, the more I got to move through, and beyond my trauma, it was like I was running through it, past it, and I was in control. Now imagine 25 kids having that experience at the same time, laughing and yelling at each other, *"you got it!" "pick up the pace" "pick up your heels!"*

It was like cheering each other on through gaining control of oneself, gaining control of our expression, our creation, our bodies, our health, and our overall state.

Something within finding that control, that purpose, finding determination, finding strength and courage. Finding the ability to change your own course. Something about playing volleyball every day together, running marathons together, helping one another carry 75-pound backpacks up mountain peaks, all of the fundraiser runs in the rain. Something about volunteering, or racing each other back to the portable, or long bus rides falling asleep on each other, or jokes about Gord and Barry's bald heads, or stories around a campfire, or Trev Barry n Gord forcing us to include one another... Somewhere in the motions of those actions, a family is built. A family I've sensed some of the most loyal and integral support and love from in my entire

life. No matter which year you go to Streetfront, and no matter what group of students you talk to or ask, that much is guaranteed.
A family.

This period of my life is quite hard to look back on and write about, as I feel I never got closure with that chapter of my life, with a lot of things in East Vancouver. That being said, I look back fondly, as a different person, in a different life, not broken, not lost or confused, not filled with rage, but with tools like what I learned from Streetfront's world that changed my path and changed my life.

I hope these few words could give you a glimpse of how special that little portable on the East Side is, excuse my word vomit, punctuation, and lack of length.

All my gratitude,
Many Blessings."

Yara O'Sidhe

STREET2PEAK - "FROM THE STREETS OF VANCOUVER TO THE PEAK OF KILIMANJARO"



When you enter the Streetfront portable, the first thing you see is a poster of the book "101 Places to See Before You Die". Trevor put the poster there on purpose, in the hopes that his students would leave East Vancouver and venture out into the world, students who rarely, if ever, cross the bridge to North Vancouver. Three to four years later, after Trevor put up the poster, he thought: *"Why don't we do this? Why don't we go places?"*

At that time, and by coincidence, Andrew Schofield, the vice-principal of Britannia Secondary School, decided that he wanted to climb Mount Kilimanjaro for his 50th birthday. Instead of undertaking this adventure on his own, Andrew saw this as the perfect opportunity to take some students along with him. He approached Trevor and asked him: *"What about Streetfront?"* Of course, Streetfront was in. Yet, this did not happen without a confrontation at Britannia Secondary School. Principals and superintendents thought the idea was ridiculous. No high school class in North America had ever climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. In addition, alternative education teachers were often considered second-class in the hierarchy of teachers within a school system because, as Trevor says, *"we are seen as hippies or freaks who don't work hard."* Indeed, the school board of Britannia Secondary School also couldn't see how

this plan could succeed; all they could see were the problems that could arise. But Andrew and Trevor believed that the students of Streetfront should see what is out there; they should not live in a vacuum. Trevor emphasizes:

"They're such incredible, talented children who deserve to be seen, heard, and experienced by the rest of the world."

So, despite resistance from the school as well as a lack of funding, Andrew and Trevor made it happen. They created the 'Street2Peak Project', named after their first endeavor to bring students from Streetfront and Britannia to the top of Kilimanjaro, the tallest freestanding mountain in Africa.

"The biggest thing is to give them an opportunity to go from only knowing a small area of the world, this little corner, to flying halfway around the world, meeting new cultures, people and experiences."
- Barry

The intention was to bring the students to five different continents spread over ten years. So far, they have visited the Serengeti and Kilimanjaro in Africa in 2015, Patagonia in Chile in 2017, and New Zealand in 2019. Although the pandemic put a stop to Nepal in 2021, the project is still continuing.

A few important things characterize this program:

Street2Peak found its roots in the Streetfront marathon program. At the beginning of the marathon program, Trevor never dared to dream that his students would run marathons. When that started to work, Trevor wondered: *"Why don't we leverage the marathon program for something even bigger?"*

On its website, Street2Peak is described as *"expeditions [that] will be rigorous and demanding, pushing the students to their limits in the hopes of showing them and the world what youth are capable of";* very much like the running program at Streetfront.

Students of both Streetfront and Britannia Secondary are eligible. While friends from childhood can become separated in the school system, Street2Peak is one way to unite them again.

At first, a major obstacle was funding. It was important that all trips would be free-of-charge for the students. Seeing the context of student lives, it would be impossible to expect that the students would be able to afford the expedition. Trevor believed finding the amount of money needed to fund a group of 15 students would be difficult, but the opposite was the case.

By writing about and telling the stories of his students, describing the obstacles they have overcome to achieve great accomplishments, they reached the hearts of people, raising thousands of dollars to sponsor the children.

He remarks: *"Don't get me wrong, but there's a distance between reading a story about a kid that transformed their life and then actually hearing that kid tell you the story of what your money did."*

The Street2Peak sponsor, the Strachan Hartley Legacy Foundation, forwent all other charities to fund not only Streetfront but the improvement of the entire neighborhood.





Despite the sponsorship, it is an exclusive program; not every student can go. Preparation for each trip starts a year in advance with a cohort of 25 students. Gord explains:

"You have to earn your way there. And how do you earn your way there? Well, you show up to school most days, you participate in all the physical activities that we have to do, and you have to be able to say that I'm not going to do drugs or alcohol. That's a huge one, of course, on an international trip. You can't be a pain in the ass and deal with the inner-city type of kids. You're dealing with a lot of attitudes. And some kids just aren't a fit to go on an international trip. But it was always a carrot out there that we would have for some of these kids. Look what you can go see. Look what you can accomplish."

Putting in the effort is difficult for students, especially a year long, but as Trevor points out, the teachers also do not have it easy:

"To tell you the truth, that's probably been the hardest thing for me. I've seen many amazing kids that could have possibly done an incredible job. But a year is a long time in these kids' lives when your life is so bizarre. You can't really take those kids."

After all their efforts, finally, they were on top of Kilimanjaro with 15 children. For both students (as we see in the student stories) and teachers, Street2Peak can bring special bonding moments. It is a Street2Peak not just in name but also in realizing shared achievements. Trevor and Gord especially resonated with this specific memory at the top of Kilimanjaro:
"During the hike to the top, we'd lost a few people along the way. Eventually, five or six students came around the corner. Being in that low oxygen atmosphere, you get emotional. Trevor and I embrace each other. We're both crying our eyes out in disbelief at how we got these students to the top of Kilimanjaro. That moment was special, it truly was." - Gord

Looking back at the Street2Peak trips and the group of students involved in these travels, Barry reflects on just how meaningful the program is:

"The reality is that we're taking in some youth who are struggling a lot. Getting on top of Mount Kilimanjaro might very well be a high watermark in some students' lives. They might have a short life because they succumb to addictions, for example. At least they can look back and say: "I stood on the top of the tallest mountain in Africa." We like to think that everybody we come in contact with is going to have a wonderful life, but that's not going to be the case. Life is cruel. So, just having and sharing those special moments with them helps them continue on, in hopes that they'll get more of that later on in life."

While reaching the peak is memorable in multiple ways, the expedition as a whole is also about understanding one's role as a youth in a complex and changing world through learning about natures and cultures (including Indigenous) elsewhere. The hope is for these youth to be inspired and become inspiring to youth at home and potentially be able to take leadership roles once they return to East Vancouver.



"30 minutes into the trek, we have to cross a glacier river in our boots and leggings. So, hand in hand, we cross this huge glacier river. Boots soaked, like what the hell, but we're all laughing and having such a great time. I look back and think: "That's hilarious." I cherish that in my heart forever. I'm so grateful for that trip." - Yara O'Sidhe, 2019 New Zealand



"I had never been outside of North America before. The farthest I've gone was Seattle. To land and get off a plane when I'm a little city girl from East Vancouver. Getting off the plane, I'm expecting to get off and feel BC air, like crisp cool air. I get off this plane, and it's just hot. It was crazy. It really was amazing. [...] The fourth day when we were going up to the peak was the hardest. You start at three in the morning so that you get there when the sun starts to rise. And because the altitude is so high, you can't stay up there for that long. And I think there were two people that didn't make it. But all of us were so determined and wanting. We cared so much about everyone else that we were pushing each other. And it was also freezing cold. And it was so cool!" - Savannah Dawson, 2015 Kilimanjaro



"I had the choice to stay home, but I knew that if I stayed home, I would regret it for the rest of my life. If I had stayed home, I would've been miserable, wallowing in self-pity. The trip gave me a space to deal with my father's passing because what better time to heal than on a five-day hike. That's what Streetfront does for a lot of people. It helps them heal." - Jacob Ainscough, 2019 New Zealand

STORIES ABOUT PERSEVERANCE, RESILIENCE, AND RUNNING IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

Through this book, we want to share the stories of Streetfront's students to celebrate them and their journeys. The book is based on interviews we carried out with twelve students, all of whom had a connection to Streetfront at one point in their lives. Most students went to Streetfront for a few years, while others went to Britannia Secondary School and joined Streetfront's running program.

The names of the students are **Willy, Toni, Yara, Eero, Savannah, Jonah, Gage, Wilson, Sam, Jericho, Ruby, and Jacob**. As we mentioned before, these students grew up or went to school in the Downtown Eastside. While it's a diverse student body with different backgrounds, different hobbies, and different personalities, they are all affected by the structural societal issues that are present in Vancouver. Some students faced addiction, poverty, and/or abuse. They all experienced something that eventually led them to Streetfront.

In the next chapters, you will read their words, their stories. In re-telling these stories, we focused on celebrating what the students achieved and how Streetfront helped them. It is important to know that we aim to share these stories on their terms, which means only as much as they wanted to share. Throughout the stories, you will probably be faced with concepts that may be unfamiliar to you. We encourage you to go back to the chapters before, for example, on the Downtown Eastside and some of the structural issues in Canada, to try to understand the context better in which these stories take place.

You will read a lot about Streetfront and running. We wanted to capture how Streetfront has helped the students and what Streetfront has done for them, but especially also what the students have done themselves. The growth they experience is reinforced by the teachers and community around Streetfront through teaching and living by a set of values that accompanies students beyond their school years. Running, in particular, helps the students understand these values and apply them to other parts of their lives. The values are energy, commitment, inertia, dedication, high standards, mental toughness, independence, perseverance, and risk. Although not written on every wall, when every student was asked about them, they recognized the values because of what Streetfront stands for and the impact it has made on their lives. Similarly, the stories of the students that will follow show the presence of the values in their journeys. These values aren't just words on a page. They shape the daily actions of Streetfront students in their lives.

This part of the book starts with a piece by Jacob Ainscough, where he talks about the experience of running a marathon. The chapters after unveil and recount the stories of twelve students that share their personal journeys.

RUNNERS HIGH



"I received a call on Sunday afternoon. Checking the caller ID, I have a strange feeling. It's Trevor. Answering the call, a cheery voice comes through informing me about a marathon in a month's time. Not a lot of time for training, but I shall do what I must. After a few early mornings-on-the-road training, the day of reckoning comes. My alarm jolts me awake. Groggily I look over at my phone. The hour of 5:30 a.m. staring back at me. After a good 5 minutes of staring at the ceiling reluctantly, I threw off the covers. Lacing up my shoes at the edge of my bed, I mentally prepare myself for the voluntary suffering I am about to put myself through. Stumbling out of bed, the coffee pot calls my name. Bringing it to a boil, the warm caffeination revives my soul as I soak it in with each sip. Rejuvenated, I step out the door. A short bus ride later, and I am packed shoulder to shoulder with a lot of people who are about to be very sweaty.

Waiting at the start line, I put my music on, and the race finally starts. At first, it's a trickle, then a river of people. They flow over the starting line, me included. It starts as a slow burn in the legs as you get your rhythm. The song 'Banned in DC' blares in my ears, the drum beat and screaming vocals setting my pace and setting a fire beneath me. 'Bad brains' always was my go-to for running music, never failing to help me run like a maniac. The songs build you up as the burn in the legs grows. Soon you fall into a trance and meditative-like state, and there is nothing but breathing. The mind is finally quiet, and the world seems much clearer now as if you can finally see the path ahead of you and the fog has been lifted.

As the burn increases and feels like it reaches its peak, it vanishes as if it wasn't there, and a wave of bliss washes over you. Runners high, the fatigue is wiped away, and you feel like you can run forever. Soon I am passing multiple people at a time. My legs are pumping to the drum beat as sweat drips further and further from my brow. I am in the state of flow that I have only been able to reach in only a few times in my life. I am hyper-focused on the task at hand, and it feels effortless. But like any wave you are riding, soon that wave has to crash and at the 30km mark, the high wears off, and my legs feel like lead. The pain comes flooding back, and the further you go, the more the mind screams for you to stop. Going so far for nothing. Each step becomes a herculean task, a total slog as your body is pushed past what feels like its breaking point.

The further I go, the more my thoughts wander. As I think back on my life, where I'm going, and what it's all for, it is in times like these that I have to dig deep within to find the inner strength to keep moving forward. 'It's all in the mind,' I say to myself, 'the pain isn't real.' The closer I get to the finish line, the more the pain grows, but I keep digging within. With each kilometer, I dig a little bit deeper. Only one thing is on my mind: finishing this race by any means necessary. If I just cross that finish line all this pain will go away. The 35km mark is where you are in the darkest depths of your mind, and you feel like you truly know yourself and all the shadows that lurk there. It's at this point where you wonder why you're doing this in the first place and how easy it'd be to stop. At the final kilometer, that voice shuts up, and the last leg kicks you into gear; at this point, what's left in the tank is burnt.

Crossing the finish line, relief comes, and exhaustion overtakes me as I hobble to the medal and photo waiting for me. In the end, I don't care about that. I know what I did, and nobody else has to. It is something I will carry in my heart always. To this day, it is these marathons that inform my life experience in anything I do. They have carried me through mountains and through loss and have made me appreciate the times of rest. If you are able to run a marathon, I implore you to go for it. You'll learn a lot about yourself and what your mind is capable of."

Written by Jacob Ainscough



STUDENT CHAPTER



WILLY DUGRAY

Age: 27

Occupation:

Non-Ferrous retail scale operator at Schnitzer Steel (Surrey)



TONI GLADSTONE

Age: 28

Occupation:

Teacher for the Vancouver School Board



EERO GAFFNEY

Age: 22

Occupation:

Student Liberal Arts and Sciences at Groningen University

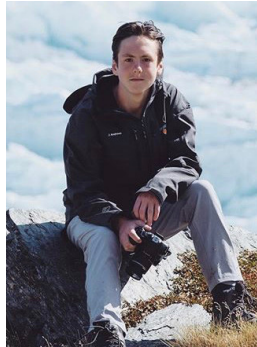


SAVANNAH DAWSON

Age: 25

Occupation:

Sales representative for a wholesaler that deals in the meat industry



JONAH ANDREWS

Age: 17

Occupation:

Social media manager; Grade 12 student



GAGE LADOUCEUR

Age: 31

Occupation:

Machine operator at Ray-Mont Logistics



YARAWYN O'SIDHE

Age: 18

Occupation:
Visual artist, tattoo
artist, hair stylist



WILSON WHITLOCK

Age: 20

Occupation:
Music



SAM BYASSEE

Age: 17

Occupation:
Senior high school
student at Britannia
Secondary, Vancouver BC



JERICOH COWELL

Age: 28

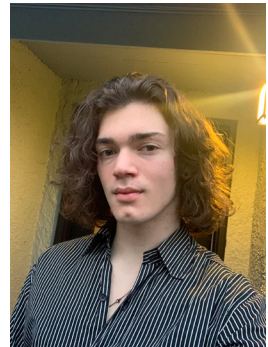
Occupation:
Food and Beverage
Manager



RUBY LOCKHART

Age: 24

Occupation:
Patient transport in a
hospital



JACOB AINSCOUGH

Age: 20

Occupation:
Fashion retail

**“I’LL FAIL. I’LL
KEEP FAILING
UNTIL I GET GOOD”**

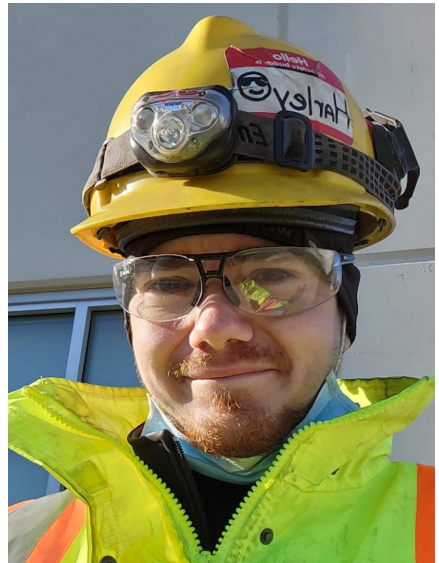
If you have ever talked to Trevor about Streetfront, chances are you have heard of Willy DuGray. Trevor likes to use him as an example of how Streetfront can help a person find their strength. Whenever Willy visits Streetfront, the new students know who he is, even though he has never met them. Yet, if you were to meet Willy now, you would not recognize him from the stories of the past. Let us now tell the story of how Streetfront empowered Willy DuGray:

Willy moved to the area in grade 7, and attended Streetfront from grade 8 to 10 between 2009 and 2011. Before coming to Streetfront, he described his life as that of a street kid:

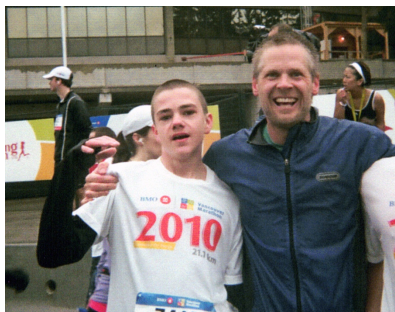
“I was a regular kind of street kid like I had a home and everything, welfare and all that jazz. I smoked, I drank, did all those things.”

His cousin had previously gone to Streetfront and recommended the school to him. Willy had heard that dancing was an elective in the main school, even though dancing was not really his ‘forte.’ When explaining why he chose to go to Streetfront, Willy mentioned:

“Honestly, one of the main reasons I chose Streetfront is that I knew that dancing was an elective [at the main school], so I decided to go to an alternative since my cousin went there previously. So that was the main reason I chose it, and I’ve never had a regret since.”



WILLY DUGRAY
STREETFRONT STUDENT 2009-2011



WILLY DUGRAY (2010)

The size of the school seemed attractive to Willy. It's spread across double portables and has just three teachers. It meant not having to navigate the big classrooms of the main school. At the time, Willy did not talk much since he suffered from, as he put it, "a bit of social anxiety." So going to a big school would be an obstacle.

Willy's first physical education class at Streetfront perhaps helps paint a picture of the kind of person Willy was: **"I remember when I first started Streetfront, and we were playing volleyball, and I wasn't good at volleyball, and literally they just put me on the field, and I just stood there, I didn't move."** He would show up to class but could not really participate. Other students tried to talk to him but would only receive a one-word answer. If he wasn't good at something, he just would not do it. He would give up before even starting.

The dedication put in by the teachers, and eventually also by Willy himself, would change this. Trevor told us about one occasion: the classroom was full of students, and then at one table, there was Willy; his hood was pulled over his head, his face barely visible, his mouth tight shut. The subject was science, and they were discussing atoms and molecules. Trevor asked the class a question, and on Willy's desk was a piece of paper. He had written the answer on it: "covalent bond." This science class was one of the defining moments of his time at Streetfront:

"THEY JUST PUT ME ON THE FIELD, AND I JUST STOOD THERE, I DIDN'T MOVE."

“ANYTHING I WASN’T GOOD AT, I WOULDN’T PARTICIPATE IN. AND EVENTUALLY I BROKE OUT OF THAT.”

“Over time [I noticed a change]. I was really shy. I didn’t like talking at first. Trevor would tell you, I always really liked science, and I think it started with his science class. He’d ask a question, and I would want to answer the question. I’ll participate if I know how to do it, so I think it started slowly with that, where I knew I was good at science, so I had no problem answering the questions to the point where he had to tell me not to answer it, so other people could answer it, and it’ll build your confidence.”

Trevor, Gord, and Barry tried to build him up. Whenever they had time, they would try to connect a little more with him. He started to feel comfortable and confident in front of people. In the beginning, if he wasn’t good, he would not participate in anything, be it in sports or in academics. He eventually came out of his shell. This is what he had to say:

“And over time, they kinda pull it out of you as you go, because maybe you don’t want to do [something you’re not good at] in front of everyone. Off to the side, Trevor, Gord, and Barry start to do something with you. You get some confidence. So for anything I wasn’t good at, I wouldn’t participate. And eventually, I broke out of that.”

Willy described Streetfront as one of his greatest life-changing moments. It didn’t just change what he was doing, such as prolonged use of weed, alcohol abuse, and lifestyle; but also his mindset:

“It didn’t change what I was doing or changed my behavior for the immediate time. It changed my mindset and how I wanna look at things going forward.” Before attending Streetfront, Willy hadn’t given the future much thought. He wanted to make it through school but was living on a day-to-day basis, not really considering what would come next. Streetfront, however, helped him look forward and develop a long-term perspective.

Initially, Willy would not try anything he couldn't do, running taught him the perseverance he needed in life, "Even if you're not good, a lot of people aren't good at certain things, but at Streetfront it's just like running. Even if it hurts, you just keep going, keep going and keep going. So it really teaches you not to quit... I'll fail. I'll keep failing until I get good. It's a special accomplishment to wake up and to suffer more than most people." And it shows because so far, he has run 17 marathons, only missing out on two.

It took him a lot of hurdles, but in the end, after finishing his first year at Streetfront, he did not want to leave even when he struggled: "I wish I could go back in time just to go through Streetfront again, all the hard times, all the times. Eventually, you just miss it after a while." This is one of the reasons why he still goes back to do the runs with the other students.

That said, if you saw Willy now, you would have never guessed he was that shy street kid back then. After Streetfront, he went to Outreach (another alternative school), where he graduated from high school. He now works at a large metal recycling company. He started a family, and, in the future, he wants to move up the ladder within the company he works for. The most important thing he learned from Streetfront is this:

"Always show up. Showing up is the first step to winning. You always gotta give it your best. Because if you come in thinking you're gonna fail, you probably will."

"ALWAYS SHOW UP. SHOWING UP IS THE FIRST STEP TO WINNING."



**“I BELIEVED IN
MYSELF BECAUSE
SOMEONE
BELIEVED IN ME
FIRST”**





TONI GLADSTONE

STREETFRONT STUDENT 2006-2008

Toni was one of Streetfront's rare three-year students. She stayed from grade 8 all the way through grade 10. If there is one thing to notice about Toni, it's that she likes to crack a joke. During our conversation with her, we also got to know her as a kind-hearted and compassionate person with a strong desire to take the positive experiences in her life and pay them forward.

Toni is one of Streetfront's first female marathon runners. She has run two half marathons, in addition to all the 10k runs she ran during the regular running program. Had you told Toni she would have achieved all that by the time she finished 10th grade, she would probably not have believed you. She describes herself as having been a lazy student. One story the teachers like to tell to illustrate this is that Toni attempted to pay someone to get her a drink from a vending machine just a couple meters away. She did not want to get up and move.

Before attending Streetfront, Toni was in and out of foster care. The first time she got taken away from home was in grade 2. What followed was a time of many back and forths between home and foster care. Things weren't easy for her. She missed her mom. One memory from grade 5 stuck with her:

"I remember just breaking down in class being like: 'I miss my mom.' The teacher was like: 'Okay, I need to do this thing with the class. Then let's try, and let's get you to call her.' I just got to talk to her for a little bit on the phone."



TONI GLADSTONE (2007)

Her teachers during that time did not seem to believe in her. Most of them were mean and would yell, so Toni started skipping school. One year, a teacher did offer to support her, but Toni was working hard, putting in the effort, without making progress in her grades, so she quickly lost enthusiasm. The transition from elementary school to high school was especially difficult.

"I had no idea what was going on. It was a new school, a new system with so many new teachers. I didn't have any friends [...]. I didn't know what the teachers were talking about, what was happening. So I just skipped again."

Getting a job, however, was also not an option as she was too young. That meant she had to continue school after all. Toni didn't want to go back to regular school, so Streetfront was the only option. She remembers the first time she entered the portable for her interview.

"I walked into the building during snack time. I saw Gord throwing snacks at kids at their desks. So I was like: 'What is this zoo? What is happening?' They were very upfront and honest about being a very active program. I was a very lazy kid. Like super lazy. And this is all I got."

***“HE’S LIKE: ‘YOU CAN DO IT.
YOU CAN RUN. LET’S DO THIS!’”***

Streetfront did accept her, however, so that meant she had to start moving and overcome her laziness. The one thing that helped her with this was consistency. When her mom started making breakfast for her every morning, it motivated her to actually go to school. Unlike her previous experience with teachers, she found that at Streetfront, the teachers really cared about her and wanted her to do well, so she did her best not to disappoint them. Just showing up was half the work. She slowly got used to running, increasing the distance as she went. Here is her experience of the first time she ran five kilometers.

“There was one day where Trevor always runs tens. So he keeps going into this unknown abyss of the city, further than where else on the route or the track. We ran together to the halfway mark for the five, and I was turning around to walk back, expecting him to keep going. But that day, he turned around too and was like: ‘What are you doing? Toni, come on, let’s go.’ And so he made me run the whole way back. I was dying. He’s talking, and he’s asking me questions. And I’m struggling so hard to get out a yeah or a no. And I’m wearing skater shoes. I wasn’t a skater. And so just like these clunky things, and so I ran the whole way back. And then he’s like: ‘You can do it. You can run. Let’s do this’.”

Streetfront occasionally joins runs with the students. One of the earliest runs Toni participated in was the Vancouver Sun Run, a 10k course.

“Trevor was frustrated that so many people were backing out when he already got the tickets. And I was like: I’ll do it. I’ll run it. He’s like: ‘Are you sure?’. I was pretty new. I was like: ‘I can run one kilometer, why can’t I run 10?’. I had no idea what I was getting into. So he signed me up for it.”

***“I CAN RUN ONE KILOMETER,
WHY CAN’T I RUN 10?”***

Toni's experience of the actual run was mixed. At one point, she got so dehydrated that people at the medical tent on the course had to rehydrate her with an injection shortly before the finish line.

Finishing the Sun Run was an accomplishment, but the decision to participate felt like "the dumbest thing ever." Toni took a break from participating in races, and it wasn't until a year later that she started training for a half-marathon again. Again, she had never run the distance of a half-marathon before, but she knew she could run 10ks, so why not 21? It turned out to be not as easy as it seemed.

"And so approaching the marathon, I broke down. I legit just cried and was like, I can't do it. I've only run 10s, and I don't even remember what the hell Trevor said, but he handled my emotions really well. He's like: 'No, you're fine. You got this'."

Trevor made it clear that he believed in Toni, even when she didn't believe she could do it herself. He knew what she was capable of. He knew that she was able to run this marathon. Trevor accompanied her through the marathon, running with the students at the back. He would be talking to her, making sure she wouldn't stop. Eventually, they made it to the 18k mark:

"And then we were approaching the finish line. And it's very telling, but I was like: 'I'm done. I'm so close. It's just right there. I stop now. Right?' And so Trevor is doing his best to be like: 'No, keep going, come on, you got this, you can do this.' And this older black woman in this really pink breast cancer awareness shirt sees me struggling, sees Trevor trying, and so she comes, and she joins, and so she's saying: 'Come on, kid, are you gonna let this old woman beat you?' 'Yes. Yes, I am.'"

"And then I see the finish line. And then it's right there. So I booked it. I just started sprinting. And I just ran. And so the welcome for groups and people, they're cheering, and they're so excited. And I'm so excited. And so I'm running and I cross the finish line and immediately hunch over."



She did it. Toni ran her first half marathon, finding the inner strength to keep going. The experience changed her life. In the following years, she participated in more runs and reflects on the sense of accomplishment: **"The knowledge of having the medal and saying I ran a half marathon with no training - I can do this.[...] if I've done that, I can do [other things as well]."**

Trevor, Gord, Barry, the random lady in the pink shirt, and her fellow students - throughout her time at Streetfront, Toni encountered many people who believed in her, which eventually allowed her to do the same. Streetfront was part of her healing journey - from the setbacks she experienced as a child and the intergenerational trauma that affects her family.

"Just the idea, you need to love yourself before you can let someone else, or you need to get your shit in order, or you need to do that. What about community and collective? Healing is like: I didn't believe in myself out of nowhere. I believed in myself because someone believed in me first."

Believing in herself continued even after her years at Streetfront. Originally, she wanted to attend an alternative school program for people of Indigenous descent, but Gord and Trevor encouraged her to sign up for the main school instead.

"'Yeah, you can do it.' So there were a number of classmates who were signing up and who wanted to go to the main school, and Gord one day pulled me aside and was like: 'You can do it. These ones want to be able to do it. They're going to struggle more than you would. It's not to say you won't struggle, which is why we're signing you up for this class so that you're still connected to us.' But they just kept believing in me, way more than I did."

"I WANT TO BE LIKE WHAT TREVOR WAS FOR ME FOR SOMEONE ELSE."

Toni successfully graduated from the main school program. After graduating, she became part of a one-year leadership program and eventually moved out to Canada's prairies to get a degree in Youth Work, then started working as a teacher. She knows how much Streetfront has changed and impacted her life and wants to do the same for others.

“I want to pay it forward. I don't want to be Trevor, I can't be Trevor, but I want to be like what Trevor was for me for someone else. [...] So, yeah, my motivation is I want to pay it forward.”

Toni has stayed extremely involved in the Streetfront community. She chaperoned on various occasions, including the Street2Peak trip to New Zealand. Streetfront has changed her life, but she sees an impact greater than that.

“It's not necessarily about those trips, like those trips are super impactful, super meaningful, and life-changing, but it's the day-to-day that's important. Are you here for the students? Or are you here for yourself? Are you doing this work because you want to be praised? Or are you just doing the work because it's the work that you feel called to? Or that you're good at? Or what you should do? I think that that gets missed a lot. And so everyone loves Trevor, everyone loves what he does and what you hear about it. And you're like, how can we spread this? How can we make awareness? How can we do this? And it's finding what makes you you and then welcoming people into that.”

Toni is currently a teacher for Indigenous education and actually comes back to Streetfront to teach once a week. In the future, Toni wants to pursue a master's of education that teaches land-based learning. She would like to be a classroom teacher. **“My idea is that I'm always growing and always learning. It just looks different in different seasons of my life.”**

**“SO MUCH OF
MY HOME IS
CONNECTED TO
STREETFRONT IN
SOME WAY”**



Eero was the first Streetfront runner we talked to. In the short twenty-something years of his life, he has run the Boston Marathon, which is one of the most prestigious marathons in the world, hiked the Patagonia mountains of Chile, traveled Europe, and coincidentally ended up studying in the Netherlands at the same university as the authors of this book. Streetfront has been instrumental in determining the choices he's made in life and continuously inspires him to try and make a difference. During our interview, we could feel his determination, genuineness, and how grateful he is for all the experiences Streetfront has given him. But let's start from the beginning.



EERO GAFFNEY

RUNNING WITH STREETFRONT: 2015 TO 2018

Eero was a student at Britannia Secondary. Like almost all the other non-Streetfront students who run marathons with the school, Eero came in touch with Streetfront through Trevor. Trevor coached cross country at Britannia Secondary School and recruited Eero at the beginning of the season. Eero joined the team, and he immediately started to shine.

After excelling at cross country, Eero decided to join Streetfront's marathons. His determination and dedication made him progress quickly – he finished his first marathon in four hours, but a year later, he managed to do it in less than three. As the first student in Streetfront's history, he qualified for the Boston Marathon, one of the most prestigious marathons in the world.

Eero acknowledges that he has had it easier in life than most Streetfront kids, but having lived close to the Downtown Eastside, he still feels connected to the community, to its positive and negative sides.

"I always felt in touch with the things that are actually happening, some of the negative things, they are not hidden. Those things aren't hidden where I lived and I prefer to have them in my life because that's how people are living. And I don't want to be removed from this. But then obviously, I am by studying here [in the Netherlands], and some things are a bit surprising or I'm not used to them when I go back, like the open drug use and people being high [...] on the streets."

Joining the other Streetfront students, at first, Eero sometimes felt a bit uncomfortable and out of place. "At Streetfront, [there are] people who faced huge challenges that most people won't face in their lifetime, that they have to face all as a child or as a teenager." Interacting with the other students made him realize how privileged he is, but has also motivated him to use that privilege and change people's lives for the better. In addition, the out-of-place feeling disappeared quickly, once he got to know the students and environment better. "We're all adolescents and it's not so much in the difference. It's more in the similarities between all of us."

Facing the challenges of marathon running together created a large sense of community between the students, both from Britannia and Streetfront. Before they knew, they were celebrating each other's accomplishments and recognized how inspired they felt by one another.

"THERE'S NOT SO MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE. IT'S MORE IN THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ALL OF US."

“ME RUNNING FAST IS JUST AS HARD AS SOMEONE ELSE RUNNING SLOWER.”

When Eero became the first student in Streetfront’s history to qualify for the Boston marathon, the students were happy for him, and it showed:

“At the school itself, there were some announcements. But then at Streetfront, everyone would always talk to me about it, congratulate me, was super excited, and was also saying, ‘Yeah, I want to do that’, ‘I want to train and get that good and do this sort of thing’. [...] I also didn’t feel pressure or so because it’s a feat for everyone who crosses the line. Me running fast is just as hard as someone else running slower and that was always recognized, and it was never “you’re better”. But it was a very supportive environment. And one that made me very much feel good doing that sort of thing.”

Some of the Streetfront students might have looked up to him for running the marathons, but Eero had similar role models within Streetfront:

“There were plenty of role models, every person who graduated from the program and came back and ran was a good role model for me.”



EERO GAFFNEY (2016)

When asked whether he felt proud of his achievements regarding the Boston Marathon, Eero said: "So much of my home, Vancouver, is connected to Streetfront in some way, for me, and my experience growing up. I mean, I was very proud. But I was only proud because I was doing it in connection to these people. And not for them. But, because of them. And I get meaning from it because of the meaning that is collective for all of us. They made it so much bigger for me." Streetfront became a home for Eero, one in which he could enjoy the warm atmosphere between the students, share the running challenges and connect to people.

To him, Streetfront is a place largely free of judgment. "The culture there or the atmosphere is always noisy. There's always people talking. But also there's the space it seems. [...] It seems like a space where, at least to me, the people can just be themselves and not be afraid of judgment. This is not always the case, I'm sure. Not for every student, especially not at first when they get there, but in general, it's a bubbly atmosphere of a lot of things happening, a lot of energy all over the place."

At Streetfront, people find the ability to rediscover themselves. Eero noted that one of the main things that contributed to this was that the teachers would be there whenever the students needed something. They are involved, not just in their education, but also in their lives. They build connections. If a student would just show up, they would be there for them. As Eero had run with Streetfront for a few years, he was able to see such changes in students. He describes his encounter with one of the students over time. When they first met, the other student was quiet, reserved, and did not really share much. When they met a second time, a few months later, however, this had changed completely.

**"THE PEOPLE CAN JUST BE THEMSELVES
AND NOT BE AFRAID OF JUDGMENT."**

“I saw [the student] growing into his own sort of unique characteristics. What interests him, being comfortable with that, being comfortable with himself and where he came from and not feeling a lack of belonging in the world, feeling like “Yeah, I deserve to be here”. Sort of taking away some of the shame. And of some things that might exist, building some of the confidence. Which translates into being comfortable with each person’s story even if it’s difficult. Not feeling like it puts them in and makes them different in a bad way.”

Everything Eero learned during Streetfront helped him in some way. Sometimes, the thoughts about privilege and how that affects his life come back. He mentioned that he had a tough year during the first year of the pandemic. “I just had a difficult year, basically. But I know at the same time that everything that I actually have is pretty incredible. And I know this constantly, this is in my head. I know it’s incredible, but then at the same, in some ways, I’m just very undoubtedly just very lucky and privileged. Which makes it harder that I’m not experiencing life joyfully when I think that or am like sour in some ways with some things, I’m just like, you have no reason to be.”

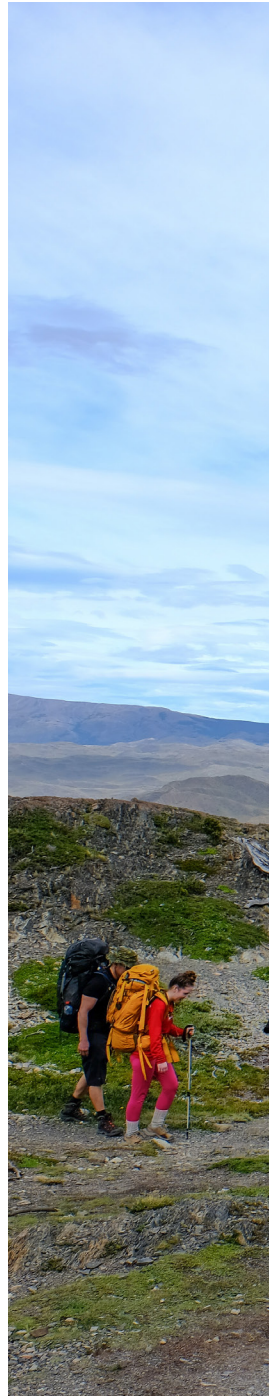
“In general, I think everything about my outlook on life was shaped by Streetfront in some way. And as I said, when I think of home this is the home I think of in some way. Which is also weird because the reality is different now and things have changed. There’s different people there, but, for me, this is really the core of my high school. My adolescence is to be found there. I think it really made me think and it makes me want to go home. And it makes me want to do something connected to these issues in my life.”

Even though he didn't go to Streetfront as a student, it had left an impact on him. What he learned at Streetfront will stay with him. When we asked him what exactly Streetfront has taught him, he told us:

"To believe in myself, for sure. But then, to have values and live meaningfully, basically, that's really what it gave me. To not go through the motions of things, to be in everything that you do. To be present and to just to really make something out of life. And then also just connecting, or solving certain social issues surrounding inequality in Canada, for instance, or other places. I mean, it's super important to me, and this also comes from my experience with them."

He wants to stay connected, live life meaningfully. For the future, this means he has no specific goals, but eventually, he might return to Vancouver and work on issues surrounding social inequality. He wants to continue taking risks, challenging himself, and taking what he learned at Streetfront to heart. Living with the things he learned.

"I chose sort of with the [university] program I'm doing and with some other things in my life to not live in a way that is super directed towards getting to some particular place, but at the same time, I do want to live with meaning [...]. And then also, this is what I said before, not going through the motions of life, but feeling like I'm actively in my shoes, making decisions, making choices. That and just being present, basically, and not letting life live me." [...] And I don't know if I'll do it. I mean, I'll try my best."



"I DO WANT TO LIVE WITH MEANING:"



At only 25, Savannah Dawson has gone through many hardships. She has had her ups and downs, but she has been able to persevere through all of it.

Savannah's beginning of 8th grade in Britannia Secondary School started a bit differently from most people. The school had messed up her schedule and left her without classes for two whole weeks. Not knowing which of them to attend, Savannah started spending time with the wrong crowd, and when her schedule got fixed, it was already too late. She had built a relationship with the other students that would skip school and would join them in this. When talking about her behavior in the classes she did join, Savannah seemed apologetic:

“When I did have teachers that really cared about me, I remember my math teacher, I went for this test at the end of the year, I was late for it, so I couldn’t actually do it. [My math teacher] had stayed later after her day to watch me do this test. And I was so, so mean to her.”



But back in grade 8, she hated school. For her, it was a bad year, and summer was even worse. With low self-esteem, she did not care and did not look after herself. Half of the time, she would not be home, staying at friends' houses, doing drugs. She had heard of Streetfront through one of her older brother's friends. Back when she was in elementary school, she remembered enjoying sports, and Streetfront seemed to be filled with sports. So when the opportunity came, she decided to take the first step and go to Streetfront.

SAVANNAH DAWSON

STREETFRONT STUDENT 2010-2012

**"I PERSEVERED
AND I KNEW
THAT I COULD
GET OVER IT"**



Savannah described the beginning at Streetfront as hard and slow as it took some time for her to get used to things. She says: "I didn't defy it or anything. I just didn't know I wanted to do well." However, she remembers her first day as positive:

"My first day of Streetfront... It was a good day. I got to meet all these people. I remember the run, though, and it was terrible. I felt a stitch in my side the whole time. I was having such a hard time catching my breath."

At first, she wasn't sure if she was going to be able to keep up:

"I didn't know if I could do it because when I was in elementary school I could, but then when I went into grade 8, I started smoking a lot of weed, and I didn't really drink until later on, but I didn't think that I would be able to run."

But then she heard that there had been only one girl who had run a half marathon in Streetfront. And she decided she wanted to be the second. While another girl ended up being the second one, she still ran her first half marathon:

"I wasn't the second. I think someone else beat me to it. But the other girl, she was a good friend of mine. She came into the program, and she was running, and really giving it her all and then I just saw that positive effect on her life. And I was like, hey, I want to do this too."

Her life drastically changed when she was 14 when Savannah got pregnant with her first son.



SAVANNAH DAWSON (2011)

“I was pregnant when I was 14. And, so my life was totally flipped upside down when I was in high school. And my mom so graciously started raising my son for me after he was about a year old. I had him, and I was taking good care of him. But I was also a kid, and I wanted to be a kid.”

She was able to go back to Streetfront, and this was the start of something better. At Streetfront, she really got the feeling that someone cared about her: they had expectations of her and believed she was able to achieve things. When talking about the teachers, she told us:

“It’s the environment that they create. It’s just such a positive atmosphere. It’s infectious, the teamwork. They instilled those values into us. People who didn’t wanna care before, they actually start caring, and they care about you as a person.”

With the support of Streetfront, she was able to grow stronger. She learned that she is someone who can achieve things, that she is someone who can amount to something. Trevor, Barry, Gord, and her friends at Streetfront helped her push through struggles. And she pushed through it, pushed her limits, and believed in herself.

“When I went to that school, I never thought I was able to run a marathon; I was like, no screw that, that’s crazy. And the way Trevor, Barry, and Gord push you to your limits and make you believe in yourself when you’re broken is just so amazing.”

“PEOPLE WHO DIDN’T WANNA CARE BEFORE, THEY ACTUALLY START CARING, AND THEY CARE ABOUT YOU AS A PERSON!”

Streetfront requires you to be present, to be active, to show up. Slacking off is not an option because you can't run if you don't give it your all, and the teachers would call you out when you don't give everything your best.

"I wouldn't drink. I wouldn't party. I hardly did anything while I was in Streetfront because I knew that if I was hungover and I had to go to school the next day, I was running 5k and who wants to do so while hungover?"

Trevor will tell you what he expects of you and when you don't live up to those expectations.

"Trevor is very stern. He won't take excuses. But he also won't make you feel bad, maybe a little bit. But he knows when to push and when to give you some space. So he'll say: 'how come you didn't do this? Hey, no excuses, get this done.' And then you feel bad, and you will do it."

She had to commit to going to class and putting in an effort. Just as running got easier, her substance abuse gradually got better too. She had days that didn't go as well, but for the most part, she would go to school and hang out with her friends after. Showing up and doing the runs were positive incentives to join the activities of that week, like camping or snowboarding.

"I was very determined. I don't know if it was to get their praise or if I just wanted to do something with my life. But it worked. And that translated into my academics. I would show up to class. I would want to do things."

***"TREVOR, BARRY, AND GORD PUSH YOU
TO YOUR LIMITS AND MAKE YOU BELIEVE
IN YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE BROKEN."***

She was one of the students that got to join the first Street2Peak trip to Africa. As she described, she was a little city girl from East Vancouver. The furthest she had traveled was Seattle. She had never left North America before. During the trip, the students climbed Kilimanjaro. It takes a few days to get to the top, but it is an incredible experience.

“The fourth day when we’re going up to the peak was the hardest. You start at three in the morning to start climbing up so that you get there when the sun starts to rise. And because the altitude is so high, you can’t stay up there for that long. And I think there were two people that didn’t make it. But all of us were so determined and wanting. We cared so much about everyone else that we were pushing each other. And it was also freezing cold. It was just so cool.”

Streetfront teaches you all these things. It gives you self-esteem and the capabilities to do something. They get you to believe in yourself. That sticks with you. As she told us:

“After Streetfront, I knew I could do anything. I climbed the tallest freestanding mountain in the world. That stays with you, and even though I did have addiction issues after Streetfront, I persevered, and I knew I could get over it. And even to this day, I’m working my butt off for this company. I’m exhausted all the time, but I’m still showing up. I’m doing my best. I give everything my all, and I think I learned that from Streetfront.”

*"AFTER STREETFRONT, I KNEW I
COULD DO ANYTHING."*



Streetfront gave her the knowledge that even when you aren't currently doing the best you can do, you are capable of doing better. It is possible to improve.

“No matter what is going on in your life, you can always go back there. It's always a safe place.”

After having her second son, Savannah got her life together. She was a surrogate to another family and wants to do another surrogacy soon. Seeing how happy the families are with the babies is simply amazing to Savannah. She also got the travel bug because of Street2Peak and would like to take her son to where she has been. For now, she has one clear travel goal related to her planned surrogacy:

“I want to go to France because that's where the parents [of the surrogates] are.”



**“THERE’S
NO NEED”**

There was one student that Trevor described as bouncy, light, energetic, and curious. His name is Jonah Andrews. We asked Jonah how he became that person. He answered with: **“I think that inside I was that person in a comfortable environment. But, around people or at school, I didn’t get a chance to be that person.”**

Jonah didn’t always appear to be bouncy and energetic. In his youth, he would get frustrated and angry at the smallest of things. He went on to mention that most of his time and energy was focused on not becoming angry, and he subsequently had no time left to be the person he actually was. Streetfront gave him the chance to rediscover that energy within himself.

Jonah had a rough upbringing, his parents separated, and he moved all over the place within Canada. All of this made him very reactive to everything; a lot of things seemed overwhelming. This led to anger. If school became too much, he would storm out of the classroom.

It was his mom who initially told him about Streetfront. Jonah wasn’t too excited to join, as that would mean leaving his friends behind. But his mom was able to convince him after she told him that Streetfront students would go on runs, go on camping trips, and do all kinds of physical activities. He recalls:

“Basically, the piece that stuck with me is when she said: ‘Instead of sitting in a classroom for six hours, you go for a run and play PE every day. You sit in the class for a bit, and then you go outside, and you play a sport, and then you come back.’ And that was the dream for me.”



STREETFRONT STUDENT 2017-2020
JONAH ANDREWS

When Jonah went to his interview, he saw all these pictures of their trips, the shirts of the marathons. If you have never run a marathon before, it almost appears as something superhuman, at least it did to Jonah.

Having room for all this physical activity meant that Jonah could finally let out the pent-up emotions and energy at school. However, letting go of the anger and frustration wasn't a process that went on its own. Jonah recalled one of his first weeks at school when he was getting fed up again:

"So, I got there, and I was trying my best to be honest. I was trying to keep my temper and my cool the whole time. I started feeling it creeping up again. I remember sitting somewhere outside of the gymnasium, kind of to the side. I was sitting there, and I thought: 'You know what, forget it. This is just who I am. Whatever.' I was going back into the gym to get mad at someone for something. I don't even remember what it was about, but I was going to get mad, and then Trevor just looked at me, and he said: 'Stop, stop. There's no need'. Those words... they just stuck."

He goes on to mention that whenever he feels like he's getting overwhelmed again, he'll just say: there's no need. It's a mantra that plays a central role in his life.

Jonah expresses that he needs to have physical activity. All students get to let their energy out in the morning and express their energy. It gives them new energy to focus on academics in the afternoon. Not every student is made to sit in their chair for six hours, and you need to accommodate that. Jonah said:

"AROUND PEOPLE OR AT SCHOOL, I DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO BE THAT PERSON."

“I think for me, [having to run] was kind of a need because I don’t have ADHD, but I need to be moving, or I get irritated, or I can’t focus. So, you get to school, and there’s PE first thing every morning.”

“We could just have fun. When it was time to sit down and do work, because we were allowed to do the stuff other times, it allowed us to get our impulse and energy out and then focus on academics.”

It also helps that everyone has a great bond with the teachers. Jonah told us about the unique bond he had with them:



JONAH ANDREWS (2019)

“I’ve never had three teachers like Trevor, Gord, and Barry. Honestly, it felt like they were also just my friends. I could talk to Gord and Barry about anything, Trevor too. I’ve had so many deep conversations with Trevor running. Sometimes I’d run with him, and we’d run kind of slow to just talk about something, and I don’t know, I’ll just soak up all his wisdom.”

This is reminiscent of what a lot of students told us about Trevor, Gord, and Barry. They mean much more to them than just teachers. Having someone who cares about you makes going to school so much more worthwhile.

***“I WASN’T DOING IT BECAUSE
SOMEONE TOLD ME TO.”***

"THERE'S NO NEED"



“I feel like that’s what made me want to put in the work. Because I feel like I wasn’t doing it because someone told me to. I was doing it because it really was what was best for me. So after that, I didn’t skip once. And those three years straight, I didn’t skip once, I only slept in some days, and I’ve maybe left early by accident, but I’ve never done it intentionally. I didn’t want to miss any days there.”

Jonah said that Streetfront changed how he lived his life and was able to return to his original, energetic self. He learned a lot, and in the future, Jonah would like to pass on that knowledge. He told us:

“One day in the future, I would like to share as much of my knowledge as I can. I want to gain enough knowledge of how to help people in certain hard situations. And try to share it, but I don’t know if I want to be a motivational speaker because I don’t want to be famous. I don’t want to be in that whole world of being a celebrity. I want people to know that I’m not perfect, and I feel like people think celebrities are perfect. I would like to anonymously write a book and try to share what I’ve learned throughout my life.”

***“I WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW
THAT I’M NOT PERFECT.”***

**“HEY MAN, DON'T
FEEL SORRY FOR
YOURSELF”**



Gage Ladouceur was an athletic kid. He was good at many sports, and at Streetfront, he excelled in running marathons. His first run at Streetfront was five kilometers. Gage was so fast that he even beat Barry and Gord. Although an amazing accomplishment, throughout his youth, he wasn't always sure whether he was actually good enough.

In grade 8, Gage went to a regular middle school. During this time, he was skipping school and was generally hanging out with the wrong crowd. At one point, the principal had enough of it and told Gage that he was going to get expelled. A school counselor pointed him in the direction of Streetfront. Gage recalled his interview before joining: he was a 14-year-old 'punk' who got into trouble regularly. He always got a little nervous around authority. Going into the interview, he was a bit scared:

“Going into that meeting, I was kind of nervous and a little shy. I remember them being welcoming. This is what we do, we go on runs, we go camping. We know academics aren't your stronger points, but we do a lot of athletics. To partake in athletics, you have to do the academics as well, and stuff like that. And once he said, running and sports, that hooked me because I just love playing sports, like that's all I used to do.”



GAGE LADOUCEUR
STREETFRONT STUDENT 2004-2006



GAGE LADOUCEUR (2005)

At this point, Gage had no confidence in himself. He was used to not feeling good enough. Gage had been in foster care and moved all over the place. His parents were separated, and both struggled with substance abuse issues. For a few years, it was just him and his brother moving through life. That is how he got into the situation before going to Streetfront. He hung out with the wrong crowd, and that influenced his behavior. The only thing he thought he was good at was running, where he didn't have to rely on anyone. It was his own thing. The teachers at Streetfront saw potential in Gage, and he got accepted. He joined Streetfront for grade 9, and Trevor gave him the accountability he needed. Gage told us:

"A lot of the time, kids say, oh, I want to do this, and I want to do that. And you know, everybody wants to be encouraged: 'Yes, good job, good job.' But then when kids stop doing that, nobody really calls them out."

But Trevor did just that. Whenever Gage wouldn't do something he said he would, Trevor would be there being honest with him, saying:

"Hey, man, you said you were going to do this. You're not doing this. Why aren't you doing this? You need to be doing this."

Having this kind of role model helped Gage set expectations for himself. Trevor's input, day by day, helped him mold into the person that he wanted to be. The advice Trevor gives is what others might get at home, the normal, regular things. For some, this might be part of their upbringing, but for people like Gage, this was lacking at home. Streetfront fills this gap.

He remembers his first day at Streetfront. He told us:
“The first day was a run day. So I just came in, didn’t do anything. I just shut my mouth. Because you know, it’s a bunch of grade 10s. I think there were only a few grade 9s, and I was one of them. And the rest of them are all grade 10s. And they’re all wearing baggy clothes and big, puffy jackets. And just looking super intimidating. I was like: ‘I’m not trying to be like that.’”

The first few weeks, he stayed quiet. He kept to himself and did what he had to. A few weeks into Streetfront, there was a volleyball tournament. That was the moment Gage realized he had to change. He wanted to win, so he had to use his voice. The other students recognized that he was good, and they had to work together to ensure that they would win.

“And we ended up winning. And then that broke the ice, and people started joking around with me. And then it turned into a little family. You see these guys every day, right? In public school, you see different kids in different classes and different teachers, right? It’s not the same thing. Every day, you have the same kids in the same class and kind of just become this family.”

Gage had found his place in Streetfront. They respected him because of his sports ability. Even though his classmates recognized his skills, Gage sometimes still lacked the confidence he needed. One of these moments was the basketball try-outs. On the day itself, he had lost all hope in himself. He met with Trevor right before and was ready to quit.

“I WAS STUCK. I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT I WAS GOING TO DO WITH MY LIFE.”

"I said: 'Trevor, I don't want to do it. Man, I'm not going to go.' And I have my bag, I was getting ready to leave, and he said: 'Stop, what's the worst that could happen? You get cut? And if everything you said is true, then what?' I responded with: 'Yeah, but you know, people can make fun of me, you know, this and that.' And he just shut it down. He was like: 'Look, man, you don't have to be worried about what other people are saying about you. Just be the hardest worker, the way you run, show me how you finish every single run, your last kilometer, you're sprinting it out every single time. Your coach can't cut the hardest working player.' And so, I got into the team, we won provincials, and it was just a great thing. So having his support and his guidance and teachings are probably what saved my life because if I didn't have that confidence in myself, I would have dropped out of school."

Streetfront gave him constant reminders and assurance to believe in himself. He had a support system and the room to showcase his abilities in sports. That is not to say that everything was fixed immediately after Streetfront. Streetfront gave him a start, but it is a process that requires a lot of work.

"I think it's more of a gradual process. After I graduated, I would say [my behavior] faded away more. But it came with a lot of pressure, right? I was also going to school to be a youth pastor, I went to Bible college, and it came with a lot of pressure because I wasn't attaining the goals that the church and the people in my life wanted. It made me feel like I wasn't good enough again. It made me feel like I was 13, 14 again, failing everybody. And I was stuck. I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I was like: 'I'm just gonna see what happens.' I didn't have very much motivation until I had a talk with Trevor again. He kicked my ass and was like: 'Hey man, don't feel sorry for yourself. You need to figure something out because you can't do anything for the rest of your life.' Every time I've needed a jolt to get back into life, Trevor's kind of been that dude."



What Trevor taught him during his years at Streetfront helped Gage get back on track whenever he got stuck. He was shown that hard work pays off and that he deserves to be confident in himself. At this moment, it has all paid off. Gage is happily married, has two children, has a job, and is comfortable. He never expected to get this far:

"College wasn't a thought, graduating wasn't a thought, I didn't even think I would have a house and a family. I didn't think I would make it past 18. Trevor just gave me the confidence to believe that I could do what I wanted to do."

Gage described his life now as a dream come true:

"Growing up. I own a house. I own a car. I don't have any worries. I live a good life. I live a life that I never ever, ever could have dreamed of. And so to be able to do stuff with my son, to bring him down to Vancouver and streetfront, and then my daughter's going to be one, and we're going to start traveling again in the summer hopefully, and I get to bring her down as well and show her where I'm from. It's a dream come true. Because I never even thought I'd make it to the age of 18. I owe a lot to Streetfront and Trevor. I told Trevor anytime he asked for my help, I do anything for you, man. You guys saved my life."

Next to his job, Gage works as an education assistant at school. Whenever a kid gets into trouble, gets angry, or does anything, they will call Gage to talk to them. He is paying forward to the knowledge he acquired in Streetfront, helping kids to give them another chance at life, as well.

**"TREVOR JUST GAVE ME THE
CONFIDENCE TO BELIEVE THAT I
COULD DO WHAT I WANTED TO DO."**

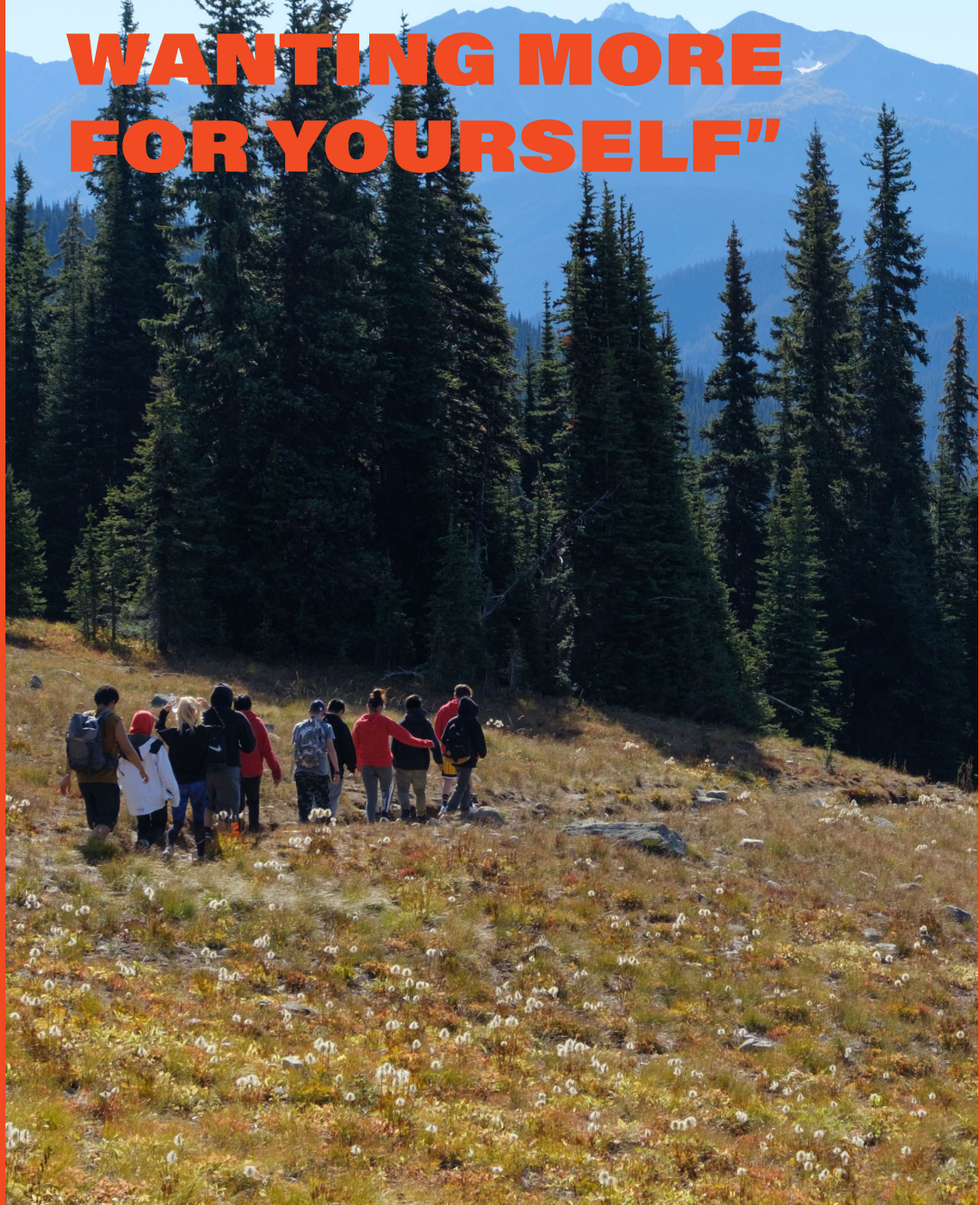
“They come to me with the problems, and I just give them the same advice Trevor gives me. I pass on the knowledge. It does feel good to be able to do that in school and do that in every kind of aspect of my life.”

While getting to where he is now was a gradual process. Gage had a clear idea of when that was finished.

“I used to see a counselor, and he used to ask: ‘When will you know that you’ve made it?’ And I said: ‘When I can sit on my front porch and not have a worry. That’s when I’ve made it.’ I can sit on my porch right now and not worry. So I made it.”

***“I LIVE A GOOD LIFE. I LIVE A
LIFE THAT I NEVER EVER, EVER
COULD HAVE DREAMED OF.”***

**“WANTING BETTER
FOR YOURSELF.
WANTING MORE
FOR YOURSELF”**



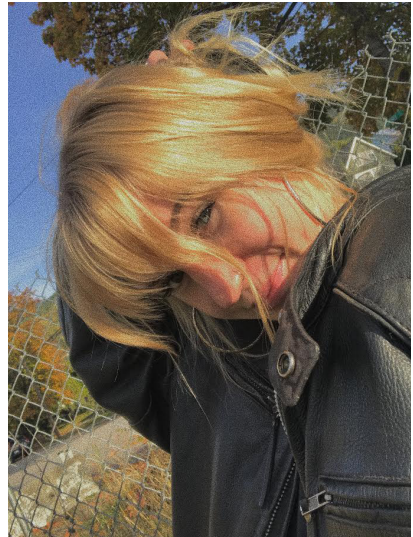
When Yara was 9, her family decided to relocate from Nelson, British Columbia, to Vancouver. Her father is a fire performer, and her mother is a visual artist. It should come as no surprise that Yara herself is also a talented artist. Next to being creative, Yara loves sports and has been dancing since she was four years old. She wasn't always connected to her artistic side.

"I grew up really fast. So by the time I was in grade 8, I was hanging out with people that were in grades 11 and 12. Hanging out with people a lot older than me, always out, not home a lot, sporadic, and all over the place and I started drinking and doing drugs."

She had lost any sense of what she wanted to do, getting sucked into, as she said: "scenes."

"This was a period where I wasn't dancing. I wasn't doing my art. I wasn't doing anything that I loved. I had totally lost any sense of what I wanted and what I was doing."

Yara joined Streetfront two years ago. Streetfront, for Yara, was this place filled with fun, "The amount of energy that Barry, Gord, and Trevor put into their students and the way that they cultivate that space and cultivate the community is so truly so beautiful. Having a classroom full of kids that didn't know each other at the beginning of the year, and by the end of the year, you're all so close, you're joking around, you're like pushing each other around. It is such a playful space to be in."



YARAWYN O'SIDHE

STREETFRONT STUDENT 2017-2020



YARAWYN O'SIDHE (2020)

Streetfront gives you this place to discover yourself. At first, you might be lost, **"but then you discover this physical intensity that ignites your mental capacity."**

Trevor teaches the students to take responsibility, you are the one that chooses, but you need to commit. If you are stuck;

"He's not going to feel sorry for you. No, you have the power. Instead of dwelling, he's going to empower you. And he's going to ask you, what are your options? Look at what's ahead of you;

What can you do to get there? And that's something that I am so adamant about in my life. I'm always trying to look at the big picture and see the opportunities and what decisions are you making to go forward instead of dwelling in this place."

She recalled her first half marathon. Yara planned to go out all night the night before. Nevertheless, she knew she made a commitment. At 06:00 AM, Yara was at the portable for the bus ride, ready to go. Her head was hurting, and makeup was streaming down her face. Once the marathon started, the rain was pouring down. Yara was really struggling. Trevor came running beside her. She realized she was the last student running.

"I WASN'T DOING ANYTHING THAT I LOVED. I HAD TOTALLY LOST ANY SENSE OF WHAT I WANTED!"

***"INSTEAD OF DWELLING, HE'S
GOING TO EMPOWER YOU!"***

"Trevor said: 'You're fine. You got it. We're gonna do this. You're here now. What else are you going to do other than finish? Let's go'. And so I did, I finished it."

Streetfront gave her the mental strength to finish what she had started. She learned that **"Once you've made a commitment, follow through. Even if it's hard. Even if it's not the best decision. Take the actions that need to be taken to get where you want to be."**

At the start of the pandemic, Yara's mother wanted to return to Nelson. She had to leave her life behind and completed 10th grade online. It was a difficult transition for Yara, but Trevor, Barry, and Gord showed her to look forward, to continue.

"So after I moved here, that was a really hard transition for me. And I think just coming from a place where I got so strong mentally, looking at the future and looking at what was ahead of me. At first, you're just in that traumatic headspace, and you have no way of looking at things logically, but after that portion of the move, I think that I was able to kind of see, okay, you know, this can be good, even though it's really hard."

She is always looking for opportunities to make things better. Your mental state carries into every aspect of life:

"When you run, you're with yourself. There's no ball to entertain you. There's no distraction. It's mental. It's you against you. You can push yourself so much further past what you think is possible. Don't back down. Don't quit. Do it because you can. You can't fail because every experience is a lesson."

"WANTING BETTER FOR YOURSELF. WANTING MORE FOR YOURSELF"





Yara is currently in grade 12, graduating high school this year. Looking back at her life, Streetfront helped her reach the point she is at now.

“Before Streetfront, I was extremely into the drinking and the drug scene, living a life very close to the East Side’s epidemic of overdose and death. Once I left Streetfront, I now had the focus and drive to let go of my life that was attached to that. I’ve just graduated high school with two trades. I have dedicated so much time and focus to my art, my body, my vision, and my creation. After Streetfront, I’ve put a lot of time into who I am and the path I want to be on. And those three men really want that for you. They put their efforts into you in hopes you find that for yourself.”

Yara is forever grateful for what Streetfront has given her; “I love Streetfront. I honestly don’t think that there has been a better school created because of the dynamic between physical and academic education. The community, the family that’s created at Streetfront, is missing in schools nowadays. Trevor, Gord, and Barry are all such beautiful human beings and have created something that will go down in history.”

“DON’T BACK DOWN. DON’T QUIT. DO IT BECAUSE YOU CAN.”

WILSON WHITLOCK
STREETFRONT STUDENT 2016-2018



Apart from a few years in the United States, Wilson has lived in Vancouver his entire life. He enjoys the diversity of the city, the food from all around the world, and the artsiness of the city. He used to draw and is now deeply immersed in the music scene. Wilson is also an athlete. Since joining Streetfront, he has run several marathons, backpacked through New Zealand, and regularly goes on runs along Vancouver's beaches.

A few years back, Wilson didn't think he would enjoy running. In fact, he joined Streetfront on the premise that he wouldn't run.

"I never planned on running. I was like: Okay, I'll go there, I'll do the snowboarding, and you know, I'll do the field trips, but I'm not going to run. Running was just something I didn't want to do. I didn't see myself doing it."

Before attending Streetfront, Wilson also did not enjoy going to school. The environment at his high school did not seem the right fit for him, and he felt lonely because of it. Teachers, homework, and relations with friends were a struggle. **"I started kind of hanging out with the wrong kind of group of people just because they were people to hang out with."** He started skipping school. It was his mom who eventually started the search for a different place for him to go to. A school counselor recommended Streetfront. The large outdoor component of the school program sounded exciting. Running, however, did not.

"I NEVER PLANNED ON RUNNING!"



**“IF YOU LEARN
SOMETHING, IF
YOU START DOING
SOMETHING THAT
YOU LOVE, YOU
CAN GO SO FAR”**

Unfortunately for him, running was (and still is) mandatory at Streetfront, so, although somewhat reluctantly, Wilson had to participate. Seeing his classmates run, the teachers and students encouraging him made it clear that running was not as bad as it seemed and that it was worth participating in. It played a big role in slowly changing his attitude.

"It was really just seeing all the other kids running. Everyone was doing it. You know, it was the coolest thing to do. That made me realize that I had friends who were running. I don't want to just be this loser walking behind the whole crew. So it actually was like a team. Everyone was inspiring each other. And that really clicked something."

Wilson started challenging himself. Running provided a risk, the ability to push himself further than he thought he would be capable of. The 5k starting distance at Streetfront quickly turned into 10k, and just two and a half months after joining Streetfront, Wilson ran his first half-marathon. He recalls the experience:

"The first time I ran a marathon, my knee was hurting so bad I thought I had some serious problem. And I was halfway through. But I promised myself I wasn't going to give up. I knew I wasn't going to stop. I promised myself if I had to walk or crawl or just, however, I had to get there, I was going to do it. [...] And I pushed through it for the whole half marathon, and then [my knee] ended up swollen. It wasn't a big deal. But doing those things where you feel like you can't do it, and you push through, and you succeed. That gives you a huge amount of confidence that you can later on use in life."

***"I PROMISED MYSELF I
WASN'T GOING TO GIVE UP!"***

Realizing that he was capable of running marathons, flicked a switch. **“When I learned, you know, that I could do a marathon, it was the biggest thing that really changed my life.”** What followed was a complete 180-degree turnaround. **“I realized, if I could stop with the smoking and hanging out with the wrong friend group, I could really take my life to a whole other place.”**

Wilson describes how attending Streetfront did not only make him realize he was capable of running marathons and pushing through, but it also helped him discover a passion for learning. He went from being the student who skipped school to the one always doing extra work, writing essays on philosophy and other topics Trevor would tell him about.

“Somehow, in my entire 9-10 years before that school, nothing that anyone was ever teaching me seemed interesting. And then, somehow Trevor is teaching me all the same stuff about Kant and all these philosophers that they were telling me about at the other school, but now he’s telling me, and I’m actually interested, it’s that real relationship, and that connection really changes just everything. [...] If your friend’s telling you something, you’re going to listen. He just did it in a perfect way.”

While at Streetfront, Wilson also found and started to pursue his greatest passion – music. An acquaintance of Trevor taught him the basics. From then on, Wilson acquired most of his knowledge on music production himself. He was able to use the skills Streetfront taught him – taking risks, finding the mental strength to keep going when times get tough, believing in yourself, and following your passions.



WILSON WHITLOCK (2019)

"Those two years really set me up for so much more than the rest of my high school time. Because if you just learn something, you just start doing something that you love, and then you realize you have that confidence in yourself, you can go so far. If you know what you want to do and believe in yourself, that's it."

And Wilson has gone far. After his time at Streetfront, he attended another alternative school program focused on music, from which he graduated in 2020. He's kept working on his skills ever since. It's not always easy to make it in this competitive industry.

"Sometimes with music, I'll lose my creativity. I don't know what to make. But I'll just remember that I'm capable of doing great things, and I just have to keep on going. Not every day is gonna be great. Not every day is gonna be productive, but you just kind of keep the wheel rolling."

His next goal is to release a single under a record label. Wiz Khalifa and Tory Lanez have already shown interest in his songs; he is pretty close. He travels to Atlanta every couple of months for work and would like to buy a house there in the long term.

"And just give it my all, and you know, see where I can take it and then figure it out from there. I'm so young, so might as well. That's the risk that Trevor teaches you to take."

While still in Vancouver, he maintains a close connection to the current Streetfront students. They run marathons together and are currently working on setting up a music workshop during which the Streetfront students will record a song. Wilson's experience at Streetfront has inspired him to pay it forward: "I always tell [Trevor], if any of the students are getting into music, I'll happily come to teach them some stuff." He is still in close contact with Trevor. "Every time I say, Trevor did this for me, he's like, 'No, you did it for yourself.'"



***"THAT'S THE RISK THAT TREVOR
TEACHES YOU TO TAKE."***

**“WE ARE NEVER
ALONE. WE DO
IT TOGETHER”**



SAM BYASSEE

RUNNING WITH STREETFRONT: 2017-PRESENT

Sam moved to Vancouver in 2015 after growing up in the United States. He's an avid athlete and has played basketball and running ever since elementary school. He currently runs cross-country and plays ultimate frisbee. Like Eero, Sam never attended Streetfront as a student. Instead, he pursues an International Baccalaureate diploma at Britannia High School. He first came in touch with Streetfront through Trevor, who coaches cross-country at Britannia.

“Cross country is the very first sport that happens in the year. So basically, the first week at school every year, [Trevor] starts spreading the word, posting up signs: cross country practice, come out after school, you do not have to be a runner, you don't even know how to run. Just come out. Have fun.”

Sam joined the cross-country team and started running with them. **“My first month at Britannia in my first year, I did more running than I had done, basically the entire year before that.”** As Trevor keeps a close connection between Britannia and Streetfront, it wasn't long until Trevor asked Sam and the other Britannia students on his team to join the marathons the Streetfront students ran. In 8th grade, Sam first joined the Streetfront students for a half-marathon. At 14, he ran his first full 42 kilometers alongside several Streetfront students with whom he had become friends. He joined several hikes and even trained with the Streetfront students to go on the Street to Peak trip to New Zealand.

***“I REMEMBER SPECIFICALLY
CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE
THAT I NEVER WOULD HAVE.”***

Connecting with the other students who had such different life stories wasn't so easy at first. Having grown up in a very Christian bubble in the United States, moving to one of Canada's most diverse cities and one of the most diverse high schools had come as a bit of a culture shock. People thought differently, exposing Sam to different opinions and assumptions about life. Running and Trevor's teaching, however, was the thing that brought them together. It allowed Sam to find a sense of community and develop friendships. He remembers meeting the Streetfront students for the first time when gathering for a marathon.

"I didn't know any of the Streetfront kids at that point. But I remember specifically connecting with people that I never would have if I had not been put in a situation where I had to run with them. I probably never would have interacted with them other than that. So I think my earliest memories are of connecting with these people who are radically different from me. But it was never a kind of confusing or a cold thing. It was always kind of interesting and uniting."

Even though he is not a student at Streetfront, the other kids and teachers welcomed him as someone "willing to run"; he became part of their small world. Interacting and running with Streetfront changed the way Sam approaches life and interacts with other people.

Streetfront **"combines these international baccalaureate kids to run with these kids who sometimes have had to live on the street, or didn't have enough food one day, and have a completely different experience of reality, and Trevor makes them into one kind of community, and they run together. And so I think being a part of that has made me approach people differently, knowing that we don't all come from the same place, and we're all experiencing the same journey together."**

***"RUNNING ACTS AS A
MICROCOSM OF LIFE ITSELF"***

When running, differences between people do not matter, as everyone is pushing through to achieve the same goal. Sam still remembers his first marathon to be one of the most challenging things he had conquered in his life. Being in this together with others, however, made him realize what he was capable of.

“Something happens when you’re running a marathon: you reach a point where it’s no longer a matter of how strong your legs are, or how much capacity you have in your lungs, or how much you’ve trained. You inevitably reach a territory that your training didn’t prepare you for; your training falls short. [...] And once it happens, you are faced with a new kind of challenge: how do I go about finishing this race when all my resources to propel and motivate myself forward have run out? It is precisely in embracing this moment, in facing this challenge, that we can most fully discover who we are, as we find ourselves by the sheer power of will able to transcend what we had thought we were capable of.”

Running becomes much more than physical activity. For Sam, it is about growing together, about realizing that no matter where one comes from, one shares the same humanity, and everyone is equally worth it. It is an entire life lesson in itself.



SAM BYASSEE (2019)

"Through running, Stokes teaches me and other athletes and students how to think, how to approach others, how to love, how to be, always anchored in the unity of the human body as we embark on life together. Running acts as a microcosm of life itself; when we run together, just as when we live together, we are all thrown into the same journey, and though we face individual challenges and obstacles particular to our situations, we are never alone. We do it together."

Even when the run is over, it's Trevor's teaching practices that continue to foster the feeling of community.

"I think my favorite memory is [...] one thing that happens consistently. [...]. So when we're running maybe a marathon or cross country or practice together, sometimes Stokes will ask: 'Okay, so on that lap, who am I most proud of?' So let's say I finish first, and then the group's like: 'Oh, you're most proud of Sam because he finished first.' And he would say: 'No, I'm most proud of David. David finished last.' So the kids are confused. And so why? 'It's David because he pushed himself faster than he did the last time on the last lap, even though he had bricks in his legs or even though he was wearing jeans.' And Stokes always likes to tease the runners about never having the right attire. So he basically taught us that every single person is a runner in moments like these. And that success in running isn't about having the fastest time. It's about beating yourself and succeeding in your own context because we're all different types of runners, all different types of people. And those moments, I think, were the ones that I could recognize everyone's perspective-changing and appreciating ourselves and every other runner a little bit more."

Religion plays a big role in Sam's life. This spirituality has influenced how Trevor approaches him at Streetfront but Streetfront, and especially Trevor, were also influential in shaping how Sam looks at life.

***"THERE'S NO REASON I
SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DO AN
IRONMAN OR RUN A MARATHON."***



“[Trevor] just like, makes everything a matter of joy and energy, even though we’re distinct. We’re all experiencing something together. And so, he recognizes he’s very sensitive to the particularities of certain people. And that way, he knows that I’m Christian, and I think a certain way, and he knows exactly how someone else is and how they think a certain way. So that’s why he’s able to unite people that come from these different backgrounds.”

“Now, I think running is kind of a manifestation of every journey that we experience. Because what a run is, is just a journey, no matter how long or how short it is, and you’re experiencing that journey with other people who are going through the exact same thing as you. And the journey is not flat even, if the road is flat, there are points where you want to give up, and you’re tired and gassed. And there are points where you feel good, and your legs are springy. And so, I think, it’s like a microcosm of what life is. And you get to experience that with people that you know and that you love. And you get to grow into that together. So to me, I think it’s kind of more than just physical competitiveness.”

Sam’s goal now is to run a marathon in under three hours. He is also planning on going to university in the United States and wants to study Christian Theology and Philosophy. He eventually wants to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a teacher at the collegiate level. Sam looks at both his athletic and all of his future goals positively.

“There’s no reason I shouldn’t be able to do an Ironman or run a marathon or hike one of the most famous mountains in the world because I’m a person too. And that’s what these challenges are about.”



A person wearing a bright yellow shirt and dark pants is sitting on a large, weathered log that spans across a stream. The stream is filled with white water rapids, cascading over numerous large, smooth, brownish rocks. The surrounding environment is lush with green ferns and other vegetation, suggesting a forest setting. The overall scene is serene and natural.

**"INSTEAD OF
BULLYING
PEOPLE, YOU
COULD BE NICE
TO PEOPLE"**

Jericho Cowell grew up in East Vancouver, British Columbia, in a single-parent home. His father had raised both Jericho and his older sister alone, influencing Jericho's positive energy and outlook on life. While he believes that Trevor sometimes 'oversells' him to new Streetfront students, his story says otherwise:

In elementary school, Jericho was a social and active child. And yet, his smaller stature made him an easy target for bullies. So when high school started, a new opportunity came up to change this:

“Just being a guy in general, the competition will always come through physicality. So being smaller most of my life, I was bullied a little bit when I was younger. And once I got to high school, I found myself in a position to be the bully instead of being bullied. And I kind of took that and ran with it.”



JERICHO COWELL

STREETFRONT STUDENT 2009-2011

Jericho was constantly alert, competitive, and aggressive as if he “had a chip on his shoulder.” He would justify his behavior by never picking on anyone smaller than him. The bullying started getting out of hand until he was expelled.

“I don’t think about it as a regret. It’s not that I don’t regret it. I think I had to go through it for me to realize that it wasn’t where I wanted to be or who I wanted to be.”



JERICO COWELL (2010)

"Repercussions were more than what I would have dealt with at the first school. The first school I went to was just a lot of average pretty well-off kids. It wasn't really that tough. But to be a tough guy at Britannia is a different thing. I realized I don't really want that kind of attention."

Jericho started to realize that "Instead of bullying people, you could be nice to people. Be there for someone when they are getting bullied. Help them instead of helping the bully."

At Streetfront, Jericho started enjoying school more. The exercise and the activity made him enjoy school. He started being interested in the things he was learning in school, feeling more accomplished as a student.

When Jericho was younger, he was never interested in his education. He used to think that he would never graduate high school, but not because he did not think he was able to do it. His father did not graduate, so why would it be necessary for Jericho? And yet, at Streetfront, he decided he wanted to continue.

"I realized that there were parts of school and education that I enjoyed and that I was good at. I realized it was something that I should do and that it would be beneficial for me to do instead of just being another person who hasn't graduated. This is why a lot of people I grew up with didn't graduate."

"I REALIZED THAT THERE WERE PARTS OF SCHOOL AND EDUCATION THAT I ENJOYED AND THAT I WAS GOOD AT!"

Streetfront gave him the strength to continue. To keep on going even when some days he doesn't want to. He has been able to run long distances and long canoe trips, so why would he not be able to finish something else?

“When you run, you're on your own team. Even if you're on a team, nobody can keep you running. If you don't want to keep running. Whenever the road gets tough. If it's work, or it's with friends and relationships, I just think back to running. You're always going to be your own team, so you better keep going and get it done. So, you always have to find a reason to either quit or keep going.”

Barry, Gord, and Trevor would focus on his strengths and help him work on his weaknesses. Barry would trust Jericho to know his limits and would, in turn, give him the freedom to be able to grow. When they would go on camping or canoe trips, Barry allowed him to go hiking or canoeing on his own. Gord, on the other hand, would be more careful. He would make sure that he was there so that there always was someone to talk to:

“Someone will definitely always have your back. Barry, Gord, and Trevor go above and beyond in a way not expected of them for people they don't have any relation with beforehand.”

***“YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO FIND
A REASON TO EITHER QUIT OR
KEEP GOING.”***

"INSTEAD OF BULLYING PEOPLE, YOU COULD BE NICE TO PEOPLE"



After two years at Streetfront, Jericho graduated from Britannia Secondary School. Streetfront had made him want to strive for things. At Britannia, he would work all summer, every weekend. When he graduated, he became a full-time employee in the kitchen he worked in before. Since Jericho's dad was a chef, he decided to work in the restaurant industry as well. He is now working in a food truck company with friends. Instead of cooking, he is currently in charge of logistics. He is working on some financial, physical, and personal goals and planning to buy some property in the next couple of years.

The most important experience that Streetfront gave Jericho was “Being in an environment where people gave me the space to do my own thing. But also expectations of me that I didn't have of myself. Because I never thought about education or my work success like that before. So I think having people give me opportunities that I hadn't had before, giving me some sort of respect, with expectations of me to do well, based on what they had already seen me do. Maybe you want to be more successful. And maybe you want to be able to do more things. Streetfront changed my life. I'm very lucky I got to go there.”

***“EXPECTATIONS OF ME THAT I
DIDN'T HAVE OF MYSELF.”***

**“PUSH THROUGH
THAT LITTLE
WALL THAT YOU
NEED TO JUST
KEEP GOING”**

RUBY LOCKHART

STREETFRONT STUDENT 2012-2013

Ruby described herself as quiet and scared when she started going to high school 10 years ago. The change from a small elementary to a big anonymous high school overwhelmed her and made her shut down. She became shy and quiet, nothing compared to what she was like before. Ruby explains:



“I had more of a personality in elementary school. Because I knew everyone, I was just more comfortable. And then I went to high school, and it was just bigger. Other elementary school people were coming, and I’m like: ‘I don’t know you.’ And I started to get really shy and quiet. And that’s not who I was before.”

It seemed difficult to imagine the cheerful 24-year-old woman we saw during the interview that way. In addition to her being shy and quiet, she described being scared of working hard and failing:

“In grade 8, I was scared to work hard, care about school, actually be there. I thought it was not cool. If I didn’t care, then if I failed, it wouldn’t be a big deal because I didn’t even try.”

School was not a nice place for her. She didn’t have many friends in her grade and did not enjoy her classes. With no motivation to go to school, she stopped going to class, so she inevitably started failing courses. When the year came to an end, Ruby was asked to see the counselor and was told that they did not believe she should come back the following year:

“I got pulled into the counselor’s office, and they were like, “next year, I don’t think you should come back.” (...). “These are the other programs available for you. That would work better.””

***“IN GRADE 8, I WAS SCARED
TO WORK HARD, CARE ABOUT
SCHOOL, ACTUALLY BE THERE.”***

Alternative schools were not something Ruby associated with something positive. In fact, she thought they were scary. Her older sister had told her about fights that would take place at her own alternative school, people drinking, and taking drugs. It all sounded frightening to her. When she was told she would have to attend an alternative school, Ruby stressed she was fully against going. But the only other alternative they gave her was repeating grade 8, something she also did not want to do. She was left with the only option of choosing an alternative school. While looking through the programs that were offered to her, Streetfront stood out:

"They gave me different options, and Streetfront was the one that stuck out to me because it was, 'Oh, you go camping. You do all this outdoor stuff.' I was like, 'Yes, I don't have to learn.'"

During the interview with Gord and Barry, Ruby did not say a word. She sat in her seat, scared of standing out, trying to blend in with the background. When she found out she got accepted into Streetfront, she convinced a friend of hers to join her.

While Ruby did not remember her first day at Streetfront, she very clearly remembered her first run with her friend:

"We started running because we thought, 'Oh, we're gonna get in trouble.' But then we got tired. So we didn't. We just kind of walked and jogged a little bit here and there when they were watching us. We got to the part where we have to turn around and come back. And Gord saw me, and I was just not out of breath. I was kind of chilling, and my friend was like [makes breathing sounds], so then Gord said: 'No, you need to run with me now.' He made me run with him all the way back because he was like, 'You're not even breaking a sweat. I don't know what you're doing.'"

***"IT MADE ME PUSH THROUGH
THAT LITTLE WALL THAT YOU
NEED TO JUST KEEP GOING."***

RUBY LOCKHART (2018)

Ruby ended up tired at the end of her first run despite her attempt not to. Over time, Ruby described that running would come easier for her. Talking to the teachers would distract her from the physical aspect. And so she was able to run 5k, and then those runs changed to 7k runs and from 7k to 10k.

On runs, and especially on marathons, fear was not an option for her. Ruby had to fight the urge to stop. Giving up was not an option she wanted to entertain, so she found the motivation to keep going and try her best.



“It made me push through that little wall that you need to just keep going. Because I knew that if I stopped at any point and just gave up, it wouldn’t feel good. I would feel like crap. I would feel like I’m a giver upper. It made me get tough skin. Just a little thicker.”

Over time, Ruby started opening up to her other classmates. With every day that passed, she started talking to them more. Like this, Ruby went from being a quiet person to someone very open and who talks a lot. Someone that sounded more like the person we interviewed:

“I guess people were intrigued, and they’re like, what’s going on with you? What’s your story? So then I would just be quiet for a little bit and then eventually opened up, and when they got to know me, obviously. They’re like: ‘Ruby shut up.’”

"PUSH THROUGH THAT LITTLE WALL THAT YOU NEED TO JUST KEEP GOING"





School became fun. She would look forward to going, would look forward to seeing the staff and what would happen that day. Trevor, Gord, and Barry encouraged her a lot. But when necessary, they would also be completely honest and confront her:

“They get you to places you want to get, and they help you achieve your goals, or they motivate you as they give you encouragement. And they’re also very honest, which is nice. So they’re like: ‘What are you doing? You could be doing better!’ They’re just very honest. And they’re just good to talk to.”

Ruby still is close with Barry, Gord, and Trevor. After graduating from Streetfront, she would go back to visit them regularly, especially during her free school blocks. At one point, she even went as often as twice a week. The three of them came to her high school graduation. Now, she still visits them once every two months.

At Streetfront, Ruby learned how to confront her fears and get the most out of herself. Right now, she works in health care as a patient transporter. When asked what she would like to do in the future, she seemed eager to keep experiencing new things:

“Definitely go back to school, if I haven’t said that enough already. That’s the main goal. (...) I want to travel more. Honestly, in the next three years, while I am still in my early 20s, I want to explore and just learn more about other places, and just be anywhere else.”

“THEY GET YOU TO PLACES YOU WANT TO GET, AND THEY HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS.”



JACOB AINSCOUGH

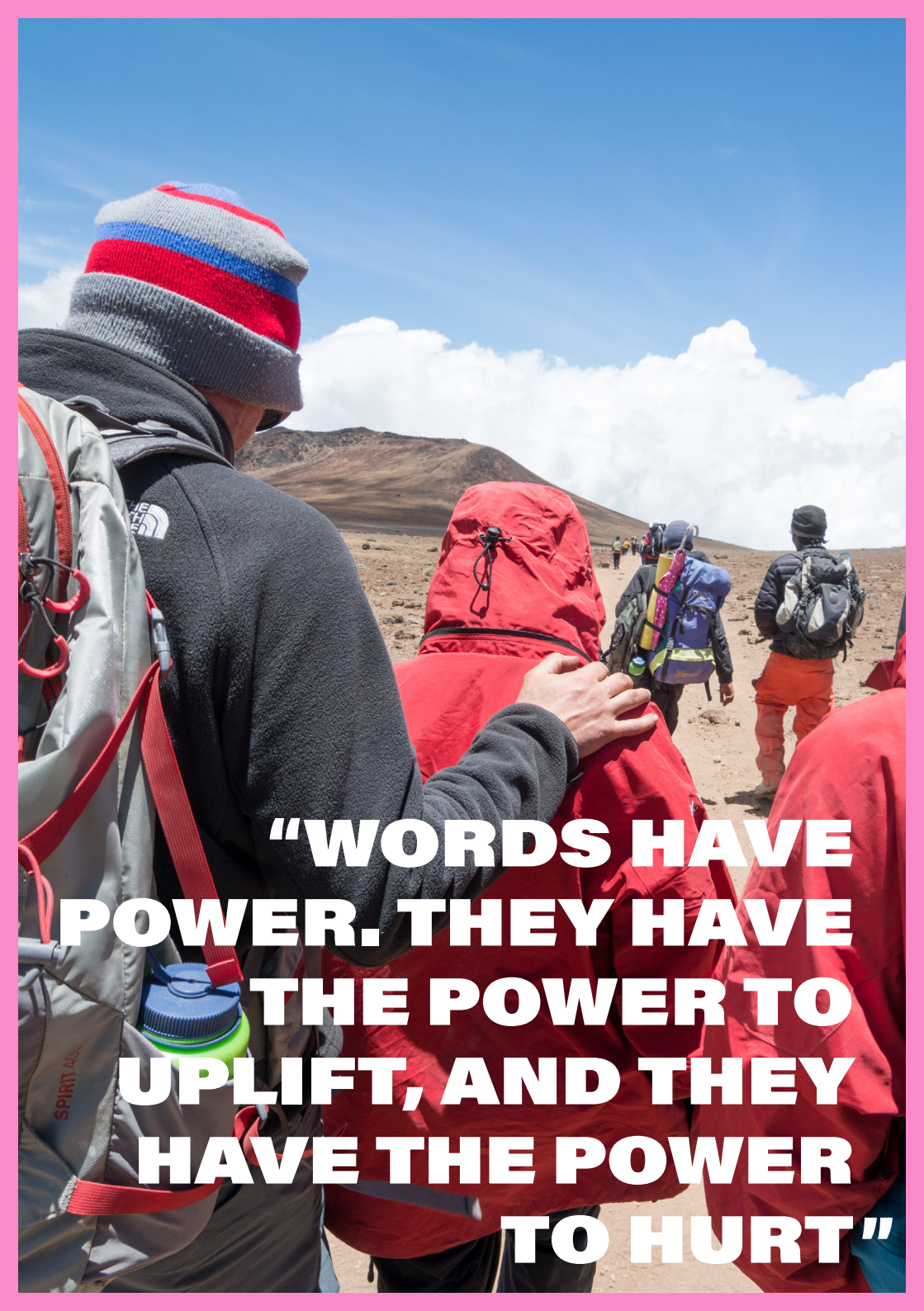
RUNNING WITH STREETFRONT: 2017-PRESENT

If something stood out when talking to Jacob, it was how well he spoke. Finding the right words when answering questions seemed natural to him. Yet, Jacob told us that this was not always the case. He stressed that speaking was something he has worked on a lot:

“I remember I used to be tactless with how I spoke. I would just say things willy-nilly. And I would end up hurting people because of careless words. And so, I realized that your words have power. And they have the power to uplift, and they have the power to hurt. And so I wanna use my words for uplifting rather than hurting.”

Jacob joined cross country in Britannia High School. With Trevor as the coach, he ended up running with Streetfront. Streetfront gave him an outlet for all the ‘angst,’ sadness, frustrations, and anger. It made him feel like he was not alone and “not the only one going through this.” Running with the other students created a unique community. It gave them all a unified goal. Everybody would be there to push and help each other through suffering and pain.

“I really think that a part of the supportive nature of Streetfront is that everybody is suffering in their own way, but you don’t have to suffer alone. There’s always somebody next to you who is going through their own struggle, their own story. And their own way of dealing with it. At the end of the day. (...) It’s beautiful when you’re able to share your pain with others and have them share their pain with you. And it’s truly that thing that makes you feel like you’re not alone. Especially when you’re going through those times of pain. (...) That’s one of the things I’m very grateful for at Streetfront. It helps people who would be going down that place of pain, and it helps to correct that – it gives them a community of love.”



**“WORDS HAVE
POWER. THEY HAVE
THE POWER TO
UPLIFT, AND THEY
HAVE THE POWER
TO HURT”**

"WORDS HAVE POWER. THEY HAVE THE POWER TO UPLIFT,
AND THEY HAVE THE POWER TO HURT"

JACOB AINSCOUGH (2019)



Jacob is convinced Streetfront kept him on the right track. Through Streetfront, he learned how to lead a fulfilled life:

"Truly, I'm more grateful than anything to have had this come into my life. I feel truly blessed."

When Jacob was 17, he was at the airport, about to leave for New Zealand for Street2Peak with

the other students. That's when Jacob found out that his father passed away after struggling with substance addiction. The teachers gave him the choice to stay home. But he knew that if he stayed, he would regret it for the rest of his life. So he decided to get on the plane and fly to New Zealand:

"If I had stayed home, and I just moved around, I would be miserable. Wallowing in self-pity. I decided to do something about it. That's about the best thing you can do when you're going through that time of pain. It gave me a space to deal with that, and thank God for it. I mean, what better time to do it than hiking a five-day hike."

On the 12-hour flight, he was devastated and grief-stricken. Yet, he was surrounded by the people that he called his second family. Once in New Zealand, they went on a five-day hike on a trail that was filled with beautiful experiences that gave him hope:

"I remember when I was in New Zealand, I had a lot of mystical experiences, times where I would see my dad in the stars at night. When you see it without the city lights, it's some of the most beautiful things you'll see. And just knowing that he was in the stars really set things in perspective. It showed me how small I was, and in a beautiful way, I was a part of this larger living and breathing world."

"THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEBODY NEXT TO YOU WHO IS GOING THROUGH THEIR OWN STRUGGLE, THEIR OWN STORY!"

He remembered washing himself in the river by the huts. Sweaty and ragged from the hike, going into the ice-cold river felt like a shock. He described how submerging himself into the water left him feeling like all his burdens had been lifted. All his fatigue and pain were washed away by the river. And he felt renewed, cleansed, at peace. New Zealand helped him reflect and heal:

“I did a lot of healing when I was in New Zealand. And I think that’s what Streetfront does for a lot of people. It helps them heal. It helps them heal from traumas they might have had in the past. It helps them heal from tragedies they might have had in their recent lives. And it helps them onward in dealing with tragedies that may arise in the future because you already have that framework on how to deal with it.”

Jacob recounted that Trevor became a sort of second father figure to him, a kind-hearted role model who would teach him how to love. Through him, Jacob learned compassion and how to understand people. He would learn that many people’s actions are driven by the pain they carry within themselves:

“Part of their pain is in you. They’re going through the same things that you’re going through. It’s just that their circumstances might be a bit different. And all it takes is a few wrong decisions (...) being misled. All it takes is having that one experience with a substance that takes away the pain. And then it’s like that, that’s your source of love. And it’s an extremely hard thing to come out of. And it’s something that my dad didn’t come out of.”

“AND I THINK THAT’S WHAT STREETFRONT DOES FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE. IT HELPS THEM HEAL.”

He came to realize that understanding, accepting, and integrating all of this pain, and accepting himself, is something he had to do:

"And that's something that I've tried to cultivate in myself (...) to continue to love myself and accept myself. Accepting that and integrating that is the first step to becoming a whole person. It is recognizing that those feelings are within you. And that you have to face them. If you run away from them, they'll fester. The shadow will grow. And then it's too big for you to deal with."

Running with Streetfront and taking part in marathons was something that had a tremendous impact on his life. It would exercise away from the pain that was in him and help him release it. An outlet to release his pain and "let it go." Exercising would leave him with his own thoughts, forcing him to learn satisfaction from within himself without external forces.

"You're left with your own thoughts for a whole 42 kilometers. I found at times that the biggest breakthroughs in myself have been while running. Thoughts and revelations will come to my head that change the way I look at things, change the ways I'd look at problems in my life, and change the way I think about how I'm dealing with my problems. And I find that they give me a new perspective for me to face the problems that I have."

Jacob recollected feeling grateful towards Streetfront and the effect it has had on his life:

"Streetfront is very personal to me. And I think that telling my story is a way to show people the good that it has done for a lot of people. I'm more grateful than anything to have had this come into my life. I feel truly blessed."

**"AND THAT'S SOMETHING THAT I'VE TRIED TO
CULTIVATE IN MYSELF (...) TO CONTINUE TO
LOVE MYSELF AND ACCEPT MYSELF."**

Jacob still runs actively today. He had just completed a half marathon the day before we talked to him. He said he “took it easy” by running a half marathon because he has not been training as much as he used to. But he stressed that it felt good.

Right now, Jacob is twenty and feels more grounded than he used to, but is still laying the groundwork and root system of what he wants to achieve. He remains active and will continue to run marathons. He has finished a degree in fashion merchandising, is considering going into fashion styling, and wants to pursue an avenue in music, focusing on vocals. Exploring local music scenes while traveling around the world is another goal of his. Most importantly, Jacob wants to “keep moving forward, and see what life has to offer.”



FONDEST MEMORY

**"MY FIRST HALF MARATHON
RUNNING WITH TREVOR." - WILLY**

**"THE MEMORY OF PREPARATION IN 2018
WHEN STOKES WENT OVER THE GAME
PLAN FOR THE MORNING OF THE SEATTLE
MARATHON WITH ALL OF US SITTING
IN A HOTEL LOBBY THE NIGHT BEFORE.
IT'S ONE OF THE GREATEST FEELINGS,
KNOWING YOU'RE ABOUT TO ACCOMPLISH
SOMETHING MASSIVE WITH ONE OF YOUR
CLOSEST COMMUNITIES—WITH SOME OF
YOUR CLOSEST FAMILY." - SAM**

**"WALKING WITH TREVOR,
LISTENING TO HIM
TALK TO ME OR SOME
OTHER STUDENT ABOUT
SOMETHING THAT IS JUST
PROFOUND - FEELING
ENRICHED." - EERO**

**"GOING TO SEATTLE AND RUNNING MY FIRST
MARATHON AND GOING TO DICKS FOR SOME
BURGERS!" - GAGE**

**"THE SENSE OF EXCITEMENT,
ANTICIPATION, ACCOMPLISHMENT,
AMAZEMENT THAT I ACTUALLY RAN
A MARATHON, AND EXHAUSTION ALL
EXIST AT THE SAME TIME." - TONI**

**"AFTER RUNNING FOR FIVE HOURS
STRAIGHT, FEET BLOODY AND
HEARTS ABOUT TO EXPLODE, WE
LOOK AT EACH OTHER, SMILE,
LAUGH, AND START SPRINTING TO
THE FINISH LINE AS IF WE HADN'T
JUST RUN 42.2KM." - YARA**

"RUNNING A 10K WITH TREVOR, SOAKING UP ALL THE WISDOM, AND HAVING SOME OF THE MOST MEANINGFUL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND ENJOYABLE CONVERSATIONS. I DID SO MANY AMAZING THINGS WITH STREETFRONT, BUT A CHILL FRIDAY 10K WITH TREVOR HAS GOT TO BE SOME OF MY BEST MEMORIES." - JONAH

"I KNOW I REALLY ENJOYED THE DIFFERENT CONVERSATIONS I GET FROM EACH STAFF MEMBER. BARRY'S HUMOR, GORD'S ADVICE, AND TREVOR'S ENTHUSIASM." - RUBY

"WHEN THE STREET2PEAK TEAM GRIEVED AND SUPPORTED ME AFTER I FOUND OUT ABOUT MY DAD'S PASSING. WHEN I WAS CRYING IN THEIR ARMS, I FELT A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER. THAT'S HOW I KNEW I HAD FOUND MY SECOND FAMILY. THEY WERE THERE FOR ME WHEN I WAS AT MY LOWEST!" - JACOB

"OUR TRIP TO SEATTLE, WHERE I RAN MY FIRST HALF MARATHON. I WAS 14 AND HAD NEVER BEEN TO THE UNITED STATES." - JERICHO

"THE MEALS BEFORE MARATHON DAYS. EVERYONE WAS SO ENERGETIC AND HAPPY!" - SAVANNAH

"STREET2PEAK TRIP NEW ZEALAND!" - WILSON

“IT’S BEEN AN HONOR BEING YOUR TEACHER”

I was asked to write the final chapter of this book. I guess they thought being the teacher for so long, I’d have something worthy to say. Possibly sum up what Streetfront is. What Streetfront means. What was it about us that made people care? For one of the few times, I won’t be writing about the kids. What made Streetfront unique?

Barry, Gord, and Trevor. That’s your answer. I’m sure of it.

Everything that you’ve read thus far is due to the efforts, dedication, and commitment of the three of us. No one person is more important. No one person is more vital. Streetfront is a beautiful example of how successfully a team can work, function, and grow. None of us possess skills you couldn’t find in other programs, but I guarantee there isn’t another program that will work harder for their kids.

Barry and Gord joined Streetfront early in 2003. I knew Barry from working at the Britannia Teen center. He led all their outdoor activities. He had a class IV driver’s license. He was super professional and nice. That’s all that was required. I had heard of this Saskatoon guy named Gord when I first worked as a long-time sub at the John Oliver Bridge Program. They spoke of a highly motivated and dedicated supporter of youth. To Streetfront’s fortune, he applied for the counseling position. Barry was the only candidate that had the necessary outdoor credentials – so he got the job. Two people applied for the counseling position, and Gord easily outdistanced the other candidate. The team was now set.

From that first day in February 2003, when Barry and Gord first walked in, we had an instant bond. There wasn’t much to talk about, not much to explain. Barry would do all the outdoor Ed stuff and offer student support, Gord would do all the counseling, and I would teach. I walked into the classroom those early days as confident as I’d ever been. I knew these kids would be loved, counseled, and educated to the highest standards we could reach.

The three of us often laugh about staff meetings or our lack of them. I think most teams or groups use staff meetings to figure out direction and content or to address existing conditions. The staff meeting creates the space where you can address the needs and issues of the program without the interference of the actual job. In the 19 years we've worked together, we might've had 3 actual staff meetings. We never needed those. They were unnecessary. Barry and Gord moved from my coworkers to my best friends within months. I would get to work excited to see them. Excited to laugh and document the absurdity that comes from working at Streetfront.

Between classes, I'd race over to the office, and we'd talk. Not the pedestrian, inane talk of coworkers but the talk of friendship – defined by conviction, truth, and honesty. During lunch, we'd discuss the issues brewing while we threw the frisbee with the students or waited our turn at Spikeball. After the last kid walked out the door, we'd plop down in our respective chairs and wonder, "what the fuck happened today?" We'd text well past midnight and early in the morning. Every interaction is bolstered with genuine admiration, respect, and appreciation. We haven't always agreed on issues, but never has that differing opinion turned into distrust or antipathy. Rather, it supported and strengthened our bonds. Those disagreements probably did more to solidify our vision and commitment than anything. We created a place where honest and sincere opinions were requested, delivered, and listened to. The issues we deal with daily are not what a typical school would see. The complexity and sophistication of these problems require a sound, probed, and nuanced evaluation of a multitude of factors. There isn't always an obvious solution or recommendation. Unanimity will not always arise. The strength of one's relationship is tested by how you respond to those moments. As I look back, I can't think of a single decision we made that caused a crisis. We agreed on a plan. The majority would rule. And, spectacularly, it did.

If I were to answer the question: “**what makes Streetfront stand out?**” one thing instantly comes to mind – we never sat on the sidelines. We decided, early on, that to get reluctant students to give us the effort we felt was required to succeed, we needed to model that commitment. It was agreed upon that we would do everything the kids were asked to do: be it playing the marimba, making a drum, carving a canoe, running a marathon, building a table, square dancing, running three times a week, or climbing a mountain. Never would a kid be able to say, “why aren’t you doing this?” We would always be in the midst. Our lack of skill would be as evident as theirs. Our vulnerability would be on display just as theirs would be. We’d do it together. We always have.

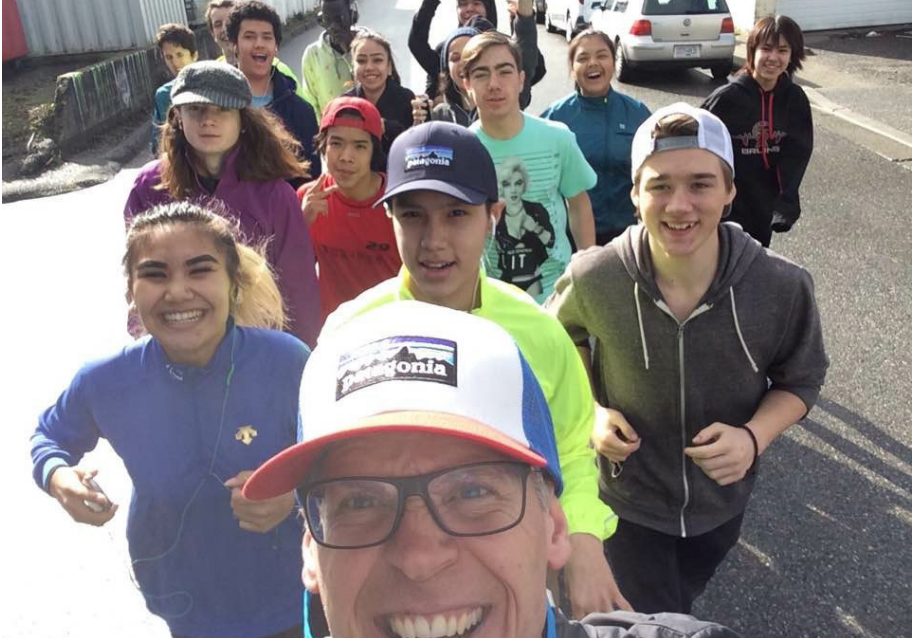
Now you might think this isn’t such a grand statement to make. Big deal. You participate. I’ve been at Streetfront for 23 years. I’ve seen a lot of subs, student teachers, and volunteers over my years, and almost nobody could hack it. Within days, sometimes hours, injuries would arise, and excuses materialized. The specter of daily high-intensity PE classes, 3 runs per week, hikes, canoe sessions, backpacking adventures, snowboard trips, standup paddle boarding, rock climbing, snowshoeing through the mountains– for almost 20 years, we showed up to work and never veered from the job in front of us. We didn’t do anything revolutionary. Sure, there were times when we were tired or injured, but the commitment to model what we expected from our students trumped everything else. That’s the story that needs to be told. Needs to be remembered. We walked the walk. And talked the talk. I don’t think there’s anything I’m prouder of. If anybody remembers anything about us – I hope it’s that we cared enough to push these kids every day. We never hid from it.

Working at Streetfront isn't easy. Life isn't always kind in our community. Just today, we learned of a student's father dying at the age of 32. We call that a Monday. The emotional and psychological toll we face is real. With every loss, with every tragic story, we further commit to each student our pledge to try and insulate them from such pain. Doing our best to try and intervene. So, they are spared the trauma. But that doesn't mean we don't hurt. The cumulative effect of working for decades under such dark skies finds you when you aren't ready for it. You think you are ok but know you kind of aren't. You think about talking about it but then decide against it, deciding that most wouldn't "really get it" or why burden them "with more sad stories"? The emotional stamina needed to stay in this job cannot be undervalued. So many have to leave. The stories are just too sad. The three of us never left, and I know why. Because we had each other. We didn't necessarily talk about our emotions or feelings, but we knew exactly how each of us was doing at the moment. It's amazing how just meeting someone's eyes - the right person's eyes can do that. Those eyes tell you, "I know you're hurting. So am I." Those eyes make you know you aren't alone. You're with your buddies. Those eyes tell you, "I'm here to talk, to listen, whenever it is that you need to talk". That's what gets you to close your eyes and think the world won't be so cruel tomorrow. The skies will lighten. The sun will come out, and we can choose to walk into that sunshine and let it warm us.

As I look back at my time at Streetfront, I'd like to say thank you to the kids for what each one brought to our school. Not every kid ran a marathon, got straight A's, or climbed Kilimanjaro, but every single kid came to Streetfront with a story. They came with the courage to walk into a classroom as a stranger. They took the risk to get to know us. They needed some kind of intervention. They needed help. They felt secure enough to trust us, and maybe most importantly, they allowed us the time to love them. Their trust and willingness to try, we allowed.

Barry, Gord, and I will some time walk away from that shabby portable and be replaced by other staff; the desks filled with new Streetfront kids. New adventures will take place, and memories created. I hope the new folks appreciate what a magical place this can be. I hope they see it as a place of great opportunity – where one can truly change students' lives. I hope they look past the obvious imperfections found in the building itself and realize it's not the building that matters – it's the energy found inside those graying walls that can change students' lives. Heart and dedication can turn discarded kids into the champions we know they are. I love you all, and I am thinking of so many of you as I write these final words. It's been an honor being your teacher.

Written by Trevor Stokes (June 2022)



“IT DOES NOT MATTER WHERE YOU COME FROM. IT MATTERS WHERE YOU’RE GOING”

With Trevor’s words, this book comes to an end. However, running as a philosophy for personal growth and the stories of students who have overcome their personal and societal challenges do not. Even if Streetfront as a school might not exist forever, chances are that while you are reading this, someone in the world is sitting down, lacing up their shoes, ready to face the battle of making it through a run and emerge from it a little stronger.

We started the introduction to this book with the following quote by Trevor Stokes: **“I think Streetfront is an opportunity to put a mirror up to yourself and say, are you able and are you capable? I say this to the kids probably once a week. I can’t change the fact that they’re poor, I can’t change that their parents might be addicted, I can’t change almost anything. What I can change is what they see in front of them when they look into that mirror.”**

Streetfront is not just any school, but one that is fundamental in improving the lives of students who have been affected by the many challenges living in the Downtown Eastside has thrown at them. We hope that with this book, we were able to give you a glimpse into the lives of students that ran, or are currently running with, Streetfront. An imagination of what they see when they look into the mirror that Trevor describes and how that changed over time. We shared their personal journeys of overcoming hardships, finding a community within Streetfront, and how they progressed in life. They showed energy, commitment, inertia, dedication, high standards, mental toughness, independence, perseverance, and the ability to take risks.

One of Streetfront's central premises is 'it doesn't matter where you come from, it matters where you're going'. And the students at Streetfront have, literally and figuratively, gone places. They have climbed the tallest freestanding mountain in Africa, they have hiked through New Zealand and Chile, and they have visited the United States for a marathon. But, and that is the most important part, they have also experienced personal growth, developed the mental and physical strength to move forward, and the ability to push through obstacles.

Trevor, Barry, and Gord, all of Streetfront's alumni who come back to run marathons, former and current students, Britannia Secondary School, and many more people and institutions make Streetfront what it is today. They are the heart of the community that Streetfront is, the core of the environment that helps the students bring out their capabilities. In this book, we set out to celebrate this community and share these stories with as many people as possible. We cannot know the future of the Streetfront in East Vancouver, but we hope we were able to contribute to ensuring that the legacy of Streetfront will continue to inspire others in places elsewhere in the world.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Most information in the book is directly taken and first-hand from the interviews with students and teachers at Streetfront. But for some things, we had to consult the additional sources listed here.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We listened to the stories of twelve (former) students and the three teachers and have tried to convey their stories as authentically as possible. However, we are mindful of the gaps in our understanding and knowledge, as well as the privilege we had in collecting and arranging the information at hand into this book. Therefore, we are grateful for the insights of everyone who helped us compile this book by giving feedback, sharing their experience, and the professional sources we were able to rely on to give context.

Special thanks to Trevor Stokes, Barry Skillin, and Gord Howey. Without them, these stories wouldn't exist. Another special thank you goes to our teacher and academic supervisor Bettina van Hoven for her guidance, motivation and countless hours spent on supporting our project. We would like to thank the people at the Honours College, and especially Gwenda van der Vaart for teaching us during the course and helpful insights during meetings, and Sustainable Society Small Grants for sponsoring our project.

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Sustainable Society

"Doesn't look like much. A standard-issue Vancouver School Board, double portable with industrial-grade paint of no true color. It sits atop a small hill, covered in pine needles, which rolls down to Maclean Ave. Go up 5 steps, and turn right. You meet a matte orange door repainted dozens of times. An elongated rectangular window with bars crisscrossing, the glass smeared with some unknown substance, prevents one from seeing inside. A path winds alongside. People pass by us every day.

Do people wonder what goes on inside? Do they know it's a school? Do they care? I do. This is where I've come to work for 23 years. This is where Barry and Gord open up the doors and wait for the kids to come tumbling through. This is where we laugh and cry with the students. Where we celebrate their successes and hold them when they break. Where we try to make the idea of a school something different – make it a place where kids want to go. As I said, it doesn't look like much, but maybe it's kind of perfect. Maybe it's exactly what we need it to be. Maybe it's the architectural manifestation of the kids we work with – a bit neglected, discarded, a little unkempt. It's a building people would overlook - see past - fail to see the value inside."

Trevor Lanes Stokes, headteacher at Streetfront, Vancouver.

This book is a collection of stories about students that have attended Streetfront, an alternative high school program located on Vancouver's East Side, Canada. Through running, they find the perseverance and dedication they need in their lives.