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# VOLUNTEERS



## Gideon - In Service to Stories



For as long as we humans have been able to communicate, we've told stories. Through storytelling we've been able to share experiences, to build connections with each other, to create community, and to heal.

Every week, a group of Homes First clients gathers to participate in the Writing for Recovery program, a series of writing and storytelling workshops that focus on the issue of harm reduction. And there to help facilitate and lead the process, you'll find volunteer **Gideon**.

Gideon began volunteering with Homes First's Community Development Department five months ago, helping to administer the Writing for Recovery program where residents from Strachan House and Savards use writing and storytelling as a means of building community and as part of the process of recovery.

In the short time he's been leading the meetings, Gideon has developed a respectful relationship with the peers, and he's been instrumental in helping to foster an environment where residents can be open and honest about their experiences.

The 25-year-old Toronto native is finishing a master's degree in political science at York University, investigating neo-liberalism and the decline of social services. He plans to ultimately get his doctorate at York. Gideon's academic studies are what led him to seek out ways to help out at the ground level.

"I wanted to get involved with an organization that was committed to the value of housing as a social right," Gideon says. "I thought that Homes First embodies that and I wanted to get involved with it any way I could."

The Writing for Recovery program features four weekly workshops every month. Two of them are writing workshops, one led by a volunteer writer from the community and one led by a worker at CAMH's Queen West facility who provides information on harm reduction.

Two peer leaders host the other two workshops where they incorporate the harm reduction skills gained and help lead their fellow peers in the process. The stories they're writing will eventually be published in an anthology of the peers' experiences of harm reduction.

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Gideon has witnessed the peers and peer leaders in the program developing a sense of empowerment through the workshops.

**“You can tell that they have a sense of ownership over the process, and a sense of responsibility and a desire to learn about harm reduction,” he says. “They definitely seem committed and really engaged in that process.”**

As for Gideon, he’s also gained a lot from being involved with the program.

“It’s really a great experience to get to interact and become involved with people who have great ideas and great spirits,” he says, “and to feel like you’re participating in something with them on an equal level towards a common goal.”

Gideon’s story is one that we see in many of our volunteers: a little learning, a lot of caring, and a big desire to help make a difference.

*Written by Jim Kelly – Homes First Volunteer Blogger*

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