



**POLICY BRIEF 2024**

# **Accessible Housing for Youth of East Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside**

*Ché Curtis Clearsky*

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷə́yəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) & *səlilwətaʔ* (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN

And Also Too

#### COVER ILLUSTRATION

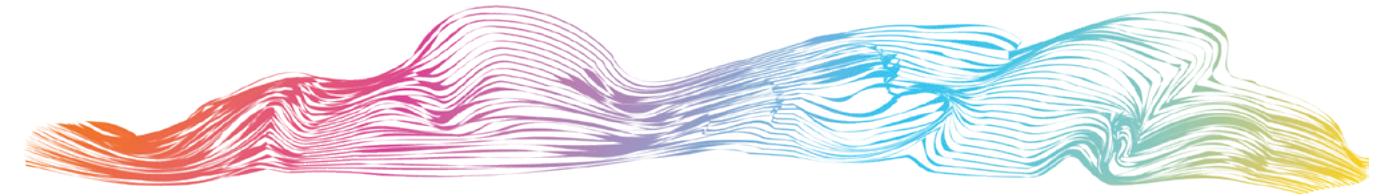
Jessica Joseph

#### HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY

Naybu Taw Photography

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# About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

### LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

### About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the *hə́nq'ə́min* 'ə́m̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the *Halkomelem*-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the *sní́chim*-speaking *Sḵwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

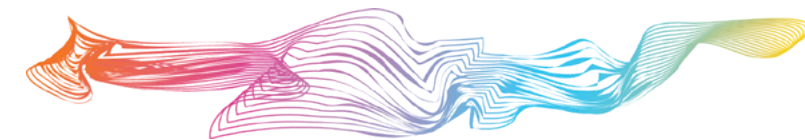
# Biography

## Ché Curtis Clearsky



*Ché is of First Nation heritage from Lil'wat Nation Mount Currie and of Kainai Nation Blood tribe. He has been born and raised in the city life of Vancouver since 1999.*

*Ché's passion for being a pillar of support in his community began when he participated in the Bladerunners program for at-risk young adults work training, and housing program during fall of 2019. Ché has varying experiences doing frontline work and supporting the community in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). His work experience in the DTES area has included maintenance work with Atira Property Management in single-room occupancy units (SROs) such as carpentry, plumbing, and electrical duties, as well as a supervisor position with Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society in a low-barrier shelter for homeless individuals that had a capacity of 97 occupants. Included responsibilities were groundskeeping of property, cleanliness within building, signing in clients, and referring to reports of barred persons, assigning beds, serving dinner, maintaining bathrooms, administering Naloxone when necessary, de-escalating incidents, and managing on shift workers. Ché is currently working with the community through Watari Counseling & Support Services Society as a Youth Outreach Worker, and connects with youth in the DTES to support and help with resources such as housing, food security, and employment services.*



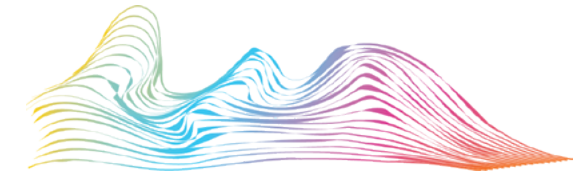
# Executive Summary

*This policy ask is based around the housing needs of low-income youth in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).*

Currently, any possible solutions either have a limited time to make an application at a certain time of year, or are not available at all due to long waitlists that offer no short-term accessibility to their services, which leaves youth with no available options. But with many new developments being built around dense metropolitan areas in Vancouver, such as The Broadway plan, the City Of Vancouver now has an opportunity to allocate these new units in an equitable manner.

I propose that housing solutions are implemented with lower-income youth in mind for future developments, and to create stable environments for young adults to flourish in. Doing so would ensure that these youth can become independent, and get a fresh start without the worry of pests and infestations that often come with living in single-room-occupancy (SRO) units.

Various housing efforts in the Greater Vancouver area, such as West Vancouver's Affordable Rental Initiative, and the Vancouver Affordable Housing Project, already exist. TransLink has planned future developments around SkyTrain Stations and Express Bus routes. By pooling together what works from existing housing and transportation projects, I believe we can make a worthwhile investment into the future of Vancouver youth. I propose that the municipal government and provincial



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government create accessible housing by holding units for youth from the ages of 18–25 within the low-income bracket, and reduce 20% off of rent to a rate of rent at 80% so that the youth can get out of the \$2,000 range if rent is on par with the average monthly rent of \$2,375, according to the Metro Vancouver residential report of 2024 from Sterling Management Services, LTD Realty Group. Property managers and/or landlords can still make profit from the other tenants who are not under the policy, and incentivize landlords with tax breaks applied to those new developments opting into the policy. If a building is designed to have under 50 units allocate 8% to youth in low-income and buildings with over 50 have 10% units allocated to youth with low-income. The percentages are based on being able to change a few lives, and to make change without the disruption of major missed income and properties are more willing to apply the policy.

# Background

*It's no secret that Vancouver has higher rental prices than most cities in Canada.*

For example Calgary is at \$1751, Saskatoon is at \$1216, Ottawa is at \$2015, Halifax is at \$2050 Winnipeg is at \$1442, and young workers are typically going to be the ones who are paid the minimum wage, and according to a study published by the Fraser Institute 53% of minimum wage workers are between the ages 15–24. When a young person becomes independent, making it on their own can sometimes feel like an impossible task. Vancouverites are spending over 60% of their income on rent, based on research covered by Liv's "Renters Info" on their website, and again from Sterling Management Services, LTD., and it would be a percentage even higher for someone living off a minimum-wage salary. When the average minimum-wage worker's monthly income after taxes is \$2,508, and the average price for a studio is typically within the \$1,700–\$2,000 range, it means

the average minimum-wage worker is one missed paycheque away from being evicted from their residence. Having little-to-no room to save money is a drowning feeling that goes up to your ears in a financial headache. As a Youth Outreach Worker and local resident of East Vancouver, I have personally witnessed that almost every person under the age of 25 is not in a position to be a fully independent adult without aid from the government or support from surrounding organizations.

I would like to implement options for all of Vancouver, but I cannot speak for other neighborhoods, such as West Point Grey, Champlain heights, Kensington-Cedar Cottage, etc., for I have seen firsthand the depths of poverty on the streets and within the housing of our DTES, and it is the lower-income region of Vancouver that will require more support.



**The impact of more solutions to OUR housing crisis will be felt for generations; intergenerational healing being passed down instead of intergenerational trauma.**



**The system fails us when we see a youth staying on the street, or in a shelter, trying to make it on their own, ashamed or embarrassed to seek support.**

Children will be the future, and their well-being is the well-being of our future. If we can get our young ones a solid start in life, they can build the foundations of a better tomorrow. The impact of more solutions to OUR housing crisis will be felt for generations; intergenerational healing being passed down instead of intergenerational trauma. If youth have a safe place to live, they are more likely to turn away from drug and crime involvement and seek educational opportunities. The system fails us when we see a youth staying on the street, or in a shelter, trying to make it on their own, ashamed or embarrassed to seek support. Becoming unhoused can normalize poverty, and the amount of energy it takes to persist in a world that feels like it's never going to let up or get better, can become debilitating, especially when wanting to improve one's own situation. Unfortunately, this has a good chance of leading to substance abuse.



**When a young person becomes independent, making it on their own can sometimes feel like an impossible task.**



Downtown Eastside (DTES), Vancouver. Photo by under\_volcano, Wikimedia Commons.

# Proposal

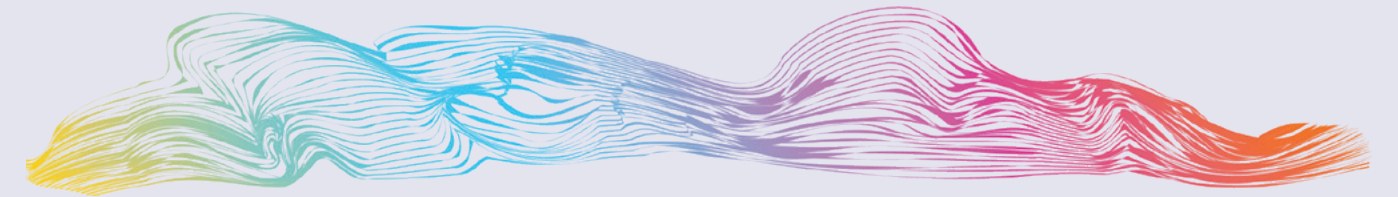
## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Hold housing units specifically for low-income young adults from the ages of 25 and under, to a reduced rental rate of 80% under the new project developments in the ten-year housing plan proposed by City of Vancouver. The low-income threshold is at \$28,863 for 1 person and \$40,818 for two people as of 2022.
- 2** Provide new housing developments with tax deductions, attributed to landlords, which will incentivize them to incorporate accessible housing for low-income youth.
- 3** Dedicate 8% of one-bedrooms and studio apartments in buildings with 50 units or less to low-income youth, and 10% of one-bedroom and studio apartments in buildings with more than 50 units to low-income youth.



***Hold housing units specifically for low-income young adults from the ages of 25 and under, to a reduced rental rate of 80% under the new project developments in the ten-year housing plan proposed by City of Vancouver.***

# Conclusion



With the current housing crisis, it's in the responsibility of our government to create solutions and options for those struggling to make it independently. This policy ask, at its core, has always had those who have been in the foster-care system in mind. Those who lose government support the moment they turn age of majority, tend to fall through the cracks of the system, and are forced to carry on without having the strong pillars of support our families may give us, or the knowledge, wisdom, and experiences they pass on. I was fortunate to have a community to lean on and to secure housing for myself. I want to do my part in helping someone else start their own path, making it through poverty. Many of my peers are not as lucky. I wrote this for them, so that they could have the same opportunities as I do.

***Those who lose government support the moment they turn age of majority, tend to fall through the cracks of the system, and are forced to carry on without having the strong pillars of support our families may give us, or the knowledge, wisdom, and experiences they pass on.***



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My family helped make me who I am today, and I wouldn't want to be any other way. These lands we live on, make good times on, and create connections on, are recognized as unceded traditional territories of the x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and səliiwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



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Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

200-475 W. Georgia Street  
Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M9

[ypp@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:ypp@vancouverfoundation.ca) [www.levelvf.ca](http://www.levelvf.ca) 604.688.2204

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