



## TAKE A HIKE COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY FUND

### Vulnerable Youth, Mental Health & COVID-19

The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been stressful for us all. Fear and anxiety can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions and reactions. It is scary and unpredictable. For those of us who are fortunate enough, our mental wellness, relationships, community and resilience help us manage this challenging time.

For the thousands of youth across the province who experience mental health challenges or other vulnerabilities, this isn't necessarily the case.

The COVID-19 crisis is compounding many of the challenges they already face – anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, addictions, and trauma. And without adequate support or specialized treatments, they risk regressing to destructive coping behaviours like further isolation or withdrawal, using substances, or self-harm. A number of their families have lost income and are experiencing food insecurity, which is likely to exacerbate the challenges they face in the months ahead.

This is a critical time. The most vulnerable youth and families need extra support now more than ever. Youth who, before the COVID-19 pandemic, had fallen through the cracks of the traditional mainstream school system, are living within the foster care system, or whose mental health issues are at risk of intensifying, need help during this public health crisis to ensure they're safe and healthy, and not impacted by further trauma.

#### HOW DOES COVID-19 AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUTH

- Increased stressors
- Unpredictable environment
- Separation from friends, family and loved ones
- Heightened concern, anxiety, and fear
- Sense of loss or feeling they've lost control
- Overwhelmed due to simultaneous change, loss, and grief

### Kim's Story

*Before starting at Take a Hike, Kim had felt alone. Their relationship with their family was strained and they were bullied at their previous school. Kim started skipping classes, became anxious and depressed, and started using substances to cope. Kim joined Take a Hike last September and started attending classes regularly. They bonded with the staff members – for the first time in years, Kim felt close to an adult. But while on spring break, when news of the pandemic became more prevalent, and social distancing measures more stringent, their anxiety and stressors rose. The day schools announced they would close for the foreseeable future, Kim felt lost and just left. They left their home with nothing but a cell phone – they just walked away.*

*Fortunately, Kim's Take a Hike clinical counsellor was available. Almost immediately, our clinical counsellors checked in with youth and their families to understand their needs and challenges. So, when Kim didn't come home, their guardian had someone to reach out to... an adult that Kim trusted. Kim's counsellor was able to find them by connecting with their friends. It took two days, but Kim returned home and has spent every day since speaking with their counsellor to maintain their mental wellness and get connected to the other services available to them.*





## Virtual Clinical Counselling for Vulnerable Youth

Access to vital mental health supports now will determine how vulnerable youth bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critically important that those young people who already face risk factors or who are already vulnerable are not disproportionately affected.

Take a Hike Foundation is in a unique position to serve the growing number of young people experiencing mental health challenges or crisis. We have nearly two decades of experience engaging the most vulnerable youth in the province, and existing relationships with school districts and communities across the province. Our registered clinical counsellors are experts in youth mental health and development and began providing virtual supports as soon as social distancing began.

- One-to-one virtual counselling sessions at least once per week for each youth
- Regular virtual group counselling and classroom check-in sessions
- Mental health support for family members
- Mediation for youth and their family members
- Safe outdoor and indoor physical exercises and engagement tailored to each youth supported through the clinical counselling team
- Development of innovative ways to engage youth in community online
- Clinical counsellors work with the youth's existing supports (e.g. community policing officers, specialists etc.) and help connect them with further resources in the community when needed (e.g. addictions treatment)

**We are ready to meet increased youth mental health need, but we need your help.**

With your support, an additional 350 vulnerable youth and their families can have access to clinical counselling. The cost of providing ten sessions for an individual – enough time to provide intensive supports that help build the resilience and skills needed to navigate the current crisis – is about \$750, or half of what it would be charged by a Registered Clinical Counsellor in private practice.

### MISSION & VISION (Why TAH)

Take a Hike Foundation envisions a province where all youth believe in their potential. We work towards this vision by empowering vulnerable youth to change the trajectory of their lives through intensive mental health and emotional well-being supports.

Over the past 20 years, Take a Hike Foundation's evidence-based and proven program has supported hundreds of vulnerable youth to develop the skills and resilience they need to: graduate high school, build healthy relationships, and navigate the challenges of life.

### TAKE A HIKE SUPPORTS YOUTH WITH:

- Relationships that are safe and caring
- An online environment that is safe and predictable
- Individualized support that meets the youths' unique and changing needs
- Continuous, intensive shared time and learning with staff and youth
- A strong belief in the ability of youth to succeed



## The COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund

Young lives will depend on the actions we take now. Prevention and early intervention mental health supports are more critical than ever to help vulnerable youth build resilience and avoid negative impacts on their mental health and well-being that could last beyond the current crisis.

A gift to the COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund will provide much needed mental health supports to vulnerable youth across BC. Your gift will:

- Continue to provide clinical counselling to current Take a Hike youth, and their families, through the summer months (a typical program year ends with the school year in June)
- Extend mental health support and clinical counselling to additional vulnerable youth, and their families, who are not currently served by Take a Hike, and Take a Hike program alumni for as long as the COVID-19 response is required
- Help recover Take a Hike's organizational capacity once the pandemic is over

## Give Youth A Healthy Future

**Young lives depend on your support.**

We invite you to join us as we invest in the mental health and emotional well-being of vulnerable youth across our province – youth right in your community.

To make a gift to the COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund visit [takeahikefoundation.org/donate](https://takeahikefoundation.org/donate), or call Deb Abma-Sluggett or Larissa Hayes at (604) 638-3385 exts 101 and 102.