

# A PLACE FOR US:

*The Rainier Women's Treatment  
Centre in the Downtown Eastside*

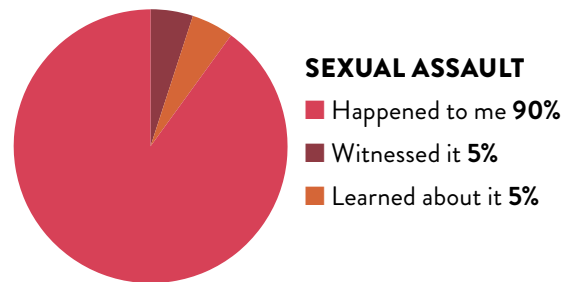
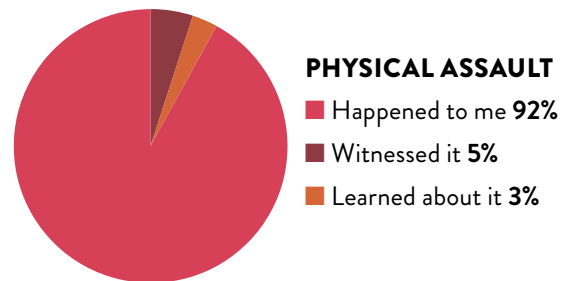


An issue that has emerged is ensuring addiction treatment facilities target people with the highest needs who may face multiple barriers to treatment (Bula 2011; Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton & Cie 2011). Opened in 2009, the Rainier Hotel Community provides addiction and mental health residential stabilization and treatment in a supported housing setting for self-identified women who are struggling with substance use, mental health and/or involvement in the survival sex trade. These women are often considered too difficult for most service providers to address and are frequently alienated from conventional treatment programs. The following report uses three methods, a Life Events Checklist, Vulnerability Assessment Survey and a Satisfaction Survey, to systematically demonstrate that the Rainier successfully serves women with multiple, serious complex needs who have experienced marginalization from conventional addiction and medical services. All names, places and other indicators that may identify respondents have been altered to ensure confidentiality.

*Results from the Life Events Checklist*

found that:

- 92% of women at the Rainier reported that they had been physically assaulted
- 90% of women at the Rainier reported that they had been sexually assaulted
- 81% of women at the Rainier reported that someone close to them had suddenly and unexpectedly died
- 74% of women at the Rainier reported that they had been in a transportation accident
- 71% of women at the Rainier reported that they have had a life-threatening illness or injury



*Results from the Vulnerability Assessment*

found that:

- Three out of four (75%) women in treatment said that they felt severely vulnerable before the Rainier
- Over two-thirds of women in treatment said that they had high to severe difficulty meeting basic needs before the Rainier

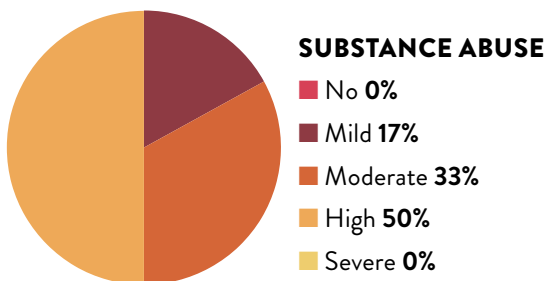
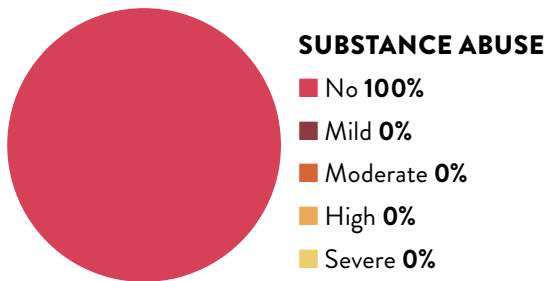
*“Even if I say I’m in control, I’m really not with dates.”*

– regarding feelings of vulnerability as a survival sex worker before coming to the Rainier

- 83% of women in treatment reported having co-occurring psychiatric, substance abuse and chronic medical condition
- Three out of four women (75%) in treatment reported high to severe difficulty with attention span, keeping appointments and impaired memory
- 92% of women on the Rainier treatment floor had high to severe mental health needs



- 100% of women in treatment said that they suffered from severe substance abuse before coming to the Rainier
- Chronically homelessness was an issue for three out of four women on the treatment floor
- Everyone on the third floor transitional housing said that they had ongoing medical problems without anyone saying that they had no impairment. 84% reported high to severe indicated mortality risks
- Everyone on the third floor transitional housing reported that they had mental health issues to some extent and one in two women reported high mental health needs



*One woman said that because of a physical disability, “I can’t have showers. It can be very depressing. I have sponge-bathed myself for the last two years and this has related into self-esteem issues. Legs have been a big issue. Being at the Rainier has helped. Eating and sleeping properly has been very helpful... I had gotten help for my foot before the Rainier but addiction got in the way”*

*“In the last 12 years, I’ve only had 3 places of my own. I have been homeless for 75% of my last 12 years.”*

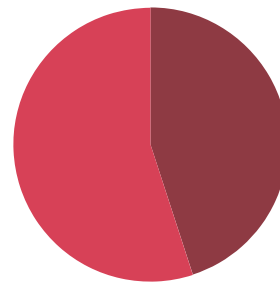
*“I’d sleep for 24 hours. I’d stay in bed for days. I’d miss going to the pharmacy to get my methadone. That’s how bad it was... the depression and everything.”*

*Treatment, she said, fell into two categories “12 steps or Jesus Christ. I felt like there was more to recovery.”*

The traumatic histories and severe levels of vulnerabilities on multiple, interconnected fronts demonstrate that the Rainier is meeting its target of reaching marginalized women with high needs and little previous support. The tragic backgrounds are juxtaposed with the themes of hope, support, personal growth and caring at the Rainier. With the open question at the end of the assessment survey, participants had the chance to discuss whatever they wanted about their life experiences and how the Rainier impacted their life. From the treatment program participants, including those who have transitioned to the 3rd floor, there were common themes of barriers to accessing or succeeding at traditional treatment. They found the Rainier’s client-centred and driven, low barrier model very helpful. Another theme that arose in the comments was how residents really appreciated the positivity and support for healing both physically and emotionally. A third theme that arose was how the Rainier taught them skills and tools for moving on and building their lives outside of the Rainier. These themes were confirmed in the satisfaction survey.

*The satisfaction survey found that:*

- 100% of respondents feel that the Rainier Program has helped them address their addiction
- 97% of interview participants said that the Rainier staff had encouraged them to be an active participant in their treatment planning and goal setting and 92% of women interviewed said that they felt more able to manage their recovery since coming to the Rainier



*"I feel like being at the Rainier is helping me achieve my goals toward addressing my addiction"*

- Strongly agree **55%**
- Agree **45%**
- Disagree **0%**
- Strongly disagree **0%**

*"This is the most I've ever gotten from a treatment centre... I think it is because they allow you to have your own recovery. It's your recovery, not their recovery. At other places, you get discharged if you relapse and then start back at square one, you know. Here, they help you learn from your mistakes... It's 100% your recovery"*

- 100% of women felt safe at the Rainier.
- 91% of participants said that the Rainier Treatment Program has helped them avoid negative relationships
- 76% of Rainier participants learn harm reduction strategies since being in the program
- 87% of participants said that the Rainier Treatment Program connected them to new health care services they wouldn't have access to otherwise and 61% of Rainier participants are now being treated for health conditions they were unaware of before beginning treatment
- 96% of Rainier participants are now connected to community services they can continue to use after completing treatment and 83% of Rainier participants are now connected to health care services they will continue to use after completing treatment



- 64% of participants volunteer in the community and 77% have been connected to employment or employment training opportunities
- 92% of women interviewed said that they felt overall better about themselves since coming to the Rainier and that their quality of life has been enhanced by the program.

The following case example of a woman I name Aiyana vividly ties together the results from the three surveys, the Life Events Checklist, the Vulnerability Assessment and the Satisfaction Survey. Beryl's narrative reflects the high rates of potentially traumatic events and complex vulnerabilities faced by many program participants and how the Rainier model has helped to stabilize their lives on a journey towards emotional and physical healing.

*“The Rainier has given me tools to learn who I am as an addict – what triggers me and what do I do with them in a positive way without using. I feel more confident about myself. New ways with dealing with everyday conflicts, you know.”*

Before coming to the Rainier, Aiyana was homeless and living at shelters. “I was deep into addiction. The whole day was about using...escaping into oblivion” She lived with an alcoholic parent and suffered from sexual abuse. Throughout her childhood, teens and adulthood, she says she was in violent abusive relationships. She has been a sex worker since her late teens. She has multiple serious medical and mental conditions, including mental illness, and was on a lot of medication. However, because of addictions, she had trouble staying on medication and meeting appointments with health professionals before coming to the Rainier. “I was very angry for a long time. Being on the street, you had to be strong and look after yourself.” However, she says that “This place (The Rainier) has definitely changed my life. I almost feel like a new person”. She says that there has been amazing support from staff and management in the safe environment, which has helped her take care of herself. “The Rainier has definitely changed me for the better. I’ve learned a lot of things... all around, it has helped me and that is why I’m still here...It’s really easy to use out there. It’s so available. It’s in your face. I find it hard to avoid that community and it really is a community. I felt like I belonged with those types of people. We all had something in common: addiction, abuse problems, violence....I’ve made some good friends here at the Rainier. It’s not easy but we work through it”

Aiyana's narrative demonstrates the vulnerabilities, needs and challenges of working with women in the Downtown Eastside with complex issues of addiction, mental and physical illness, poverty and involvement in the survival sex trade but also the positive impact of the Rainier on her life.

The Rainier Community, which consists of 2nd floor treatment center and 3rd floor transitional housing, is a progressive, holistic approach of treatment and recovery. The Rainier aims to work with highly marginalized, impoverished women battling addiction issues and participating in survival sex trade that face barriers to traditional treatment programs. This report has systemically demonstrated that the Rainier Community successfully serves a highly challenging, alienated and marginalized client population who often has traumatic histories of violence and poverty through three methods. The Rainier model helps women who have previously faced barriers to treatment learn to control their addictions and better manage their lives. The Rainier treatment program is shown to support journeys of healing both emotionally and medically by rebuilding self-confidence through compassionate counseling, work and volunteer opportunities and through connections to medical services. The Rainier offers an opportunity, where through providing an environment of safety, support, caring and non-judgment, allows the women who participate to rediscover their inner potential.

*“We need more of these.  
I am overwhelmedly  
grateful. Just the disbelieve  
that I’m getting this kind  
of help and that this help  
is out there – the sewing,  
the carpentry, upgrading  
computer skills –it’s so  
wonderful... like, pinch me...  
I can’t imagine a  
better program.”*



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