



For three days last fall, students from TWU's Anthropology 101 class lived among the residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Students joined in soup kitchen line-ups, participated in street ministries, and engaged in conversations with locals to experience life from the perspective of those who live in the notorious neighbourhood.

"Many media portrayals of the Downtown Eastside aren't fair evaluations of the community or the individuals living there," says fourth-year religious studies major Dylan Kelso.

The outing's immersive nature encouraged students to apply principles of anthropological research by joining in the day-to-day activities of residents, many of whom live on the streets or in low-income housing units. The students were tasked with lending an ear to a community rarely given the opportunity to speak for itself.

The experience challenged students to see homelessness, poverty, and addiction through the lives and stories of those who face these issues daily. Equipped with this new outlook, the students plan to compare the residents' perspectives with those of government and social agencies currently serving the dtes, in the hope of finding more effective ways to support residents.

Based on their findings, the students will publish a report that contains recommendations for practical improvements social agencies and ministries could implement to encourage self-sustaining, long-term solutions to the challenges dtes residents face.

"Although many people in the neighbourhood live under difficult conditions, their stories are filled with hopes, aspirations, and dreams," Kelso says. "This community has a lot to teach anybody with an ear to listen."

*by Dylan Kelso*