

CLARA HUGHES SAYS SPORTS SAVED HER LIFE

By Lindsay Kines
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“There is a Big Problem here,” said the troubled teen who went on to do something no other Olympian has ever accomplished.

Last summer Clara Hughes took a wrong turn and ended up in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

The Canadian Olympic Champion had just moved to Richmond to train at the Speed-Skating Oval. She was looking for Organic Food Stores and Cool Shops in downtown Vancouver. Instead she ended up in a neighborhood beset by Drug Addiction, Poverty and Despair.

Hughes went home that day and told her husband, Peter Guzman, that she had to try to make a difference.

“I cannot leave town without feeling that at least I have done something to maybe help this,” she told him.

Her husband had been kayaking on the north-west coast of Vancouver Island in the Spring where he met a teacher with the “Take a Hike Program at John Oliver Secondary School”.

The Program takes youth struggling with addictions and introduces them to challenging outdoor

adventures. It helps develop new skills and build self-esteem.

As a teenager growing up in Winnipeg, Hughes “got into a lot of trouble,” she said. “I was one of those students who did not care about anything. I was involved in a lot of drinking at a young age and drugs and smoking a pack a day. That was me and this is now.”

Hughes, who is the only person to ever win multiple medals at both the Summer and Winter Olympics believes sports saved her life.

While that may not be the answer for everyone, “goals and dreams and a sense of self-worth are the answer,” she said.

Hughes won the Bronze Medal in the 5,000 metres, her sixth Olympic Medal, she and her husband donated the entire \$10,000 winner’s bonus to the Take a Hike. Her hope is that this program will keep some teenagers from taking their own wrong turn to the street of Vancouver.