

# Our Stories

FALL NEWSLETTER 2014

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Outreach Worker Benoit with Rose in Our Place courtyard

We thank Tech Web Direct for donating  
resources to print this full-colour newsletter



**ourplace**

Hope and Belonging

## Executive Director's Message

When I look at the faces of all the people who come into Our Place on a daily basis, the one question that constantly runs through my mind is: "How can we better meet their needs?"

Food, clothing and shelter from the elements are just the beginning of what we, with the support of our donors and volunteers, offer to the most vulnerable in our community.

Like any close-knit family, we want to offer a hand up to those family members who have fallen by the wayside. This means creating opportunities in the areas of employment, health care and education, plus providing the basic skills needed to get their life on track.

Often we see people walk through our doors in rough shape: distraught, suffering from abuse, trauma, anxiety and fear, with addiction and mental health issues, and physical disabilities.

Our front-line staff and volunteers are wonderful in making everyone feel valued, and in getting people to open up about what they really need. Whether it's help with housing, or referrals to doctors and dentists, one-on-one sessions with our Chaplain, Outreach workers or Mental Health and Addiction clinician, our skilled staff works diligently to meet their needs.

Thanks to some new funding, we have recently hired two Aboriginal Housing Support workers, and are in the process

of bringing a First Nations elder on staff in an advisory capacity to help us better understand the needs and concerns of the over 30% of our family members who identify as Aboriginal.

We are also in the process of transforming a small room adjacent to our Drop-In area into a medical clinic that will provide health services.

This fall we are expanding our winter hours (see story on Page 6) and offering new programs, just two more ways in which we are striving to better meet the needs of our community.

Warm Regards,



Don Evans  
Executive Director



## Our Recent Events

### Pride Parade

July kicked off with a successful **Pride Parade** that saw over 50 volunteers, family members and staff participating. We decorated the Our Place truck with colourful signs (donated by Island Blue), and wore special T-shirts (designed in-house) that were a hit with everyone. At the festival, we set up a booth to increase awareness of all that Our Place offers and let the community know that we are welcoming and inclusive of all those living in



poverty, regardless of sexual orientation. One of our transgendered family members told us how proud he felt to walk in the parade for the first time because of our participation.

### Aboriginal Day

We celebrated National Aboriginal Day in style. The Esquimalt Dancers & Drummers performed in our courtyard, and we served fresh sockeye salmon for lunch. The meal was blessed by long-time Our Place supporter, Cowichan elder Bob Nye. Approximately one-third of our family members identify as Aboriginal and appreciated having their culture acknowledged.

### Hotel Association Support

"Our Place has provided more than 400,000 meals this past year, a daunting number for any hotelier," says Reid James, chair of the Hotel Association of Greater Victoria. "It was a natural fit for us to donate the funds to offset the cost of one lunch a month for a year. Food is such



Swans Hotel & Brewpub staff help prepare lunch

an important aspect of building a community and keeping people healthy. Our Place Society provides delicious and nutritious meals in a warm, friendly atmosphere, which is what good hospitality is all about." In total, the association donated \$7,800 and members are volunteering to help serve the meals.

**To find out about upcoming events and other news, please visit us online at [ourplacesociety.com/get-involved/](http://ourplacesociety.com/get-involved/)**

< **BASEBALL:** Thanks to the support of an anonymous donor, the Our Place Outreach and Kitchen teams hosted four Baseball & BBQ events in July and August. We provided a shuttle service from Our Place to Beacon Hill Park. Wonderful weather and a great turn out meant each one of our games was a big hit and a great escape from the daily struggles that many of our family members face.

## THANK YOU!

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU. We are truly grateful to everyone who contributes to Our Place. We appreciate the care and compassion shown by donations of time, talent and money that benefit our family members. The increased programs and services offered would not have been possible without the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters like you. Thank you!

# Our Family

## Rose's Story

**When Rose was studying to earn her Business Administration degree in Prince George, she never set her sights on future goals or dreams.**

But if she had, it's unlikely that she would ever have imagined trying to live on a government allowance of \$500 per month when her rent cost \$495.

"I picked bottles for four years to pay the rent and buy presents for my son," says Rose. "I've never been afraid of hard work, and never believed in selling my body."

At one of her lowest points, Rose weighed only 80 pounds and had such dark rings under her eyes that people assumed she was a heroin addict.

"I was embarrassed and too shy to ask for help," she says. "It was the street community who saw that I was hurting and who reached out to me. They talked about Our Place and invited me to join them for a meal."

At first, Rose visited Our Place discreetly, keeping to herself, but too shy even to take the free clothing that is offered in our lower level.

"I didn't want to be at Our Place, to accept

the generosity." She lowers her eyes and shrugs. "It was embarrassing, but unless I wanted to starve, I had to."

Rose's downfall began when she met the wrong man.

"I didn't know it at the time, but I was in a deep depression, heartbroken over another man."

By the time she discovered her new boyfriend was dangerous, it was too late.

"He wouldn't let me break it off," she says.

Against her will, Rose became pregnant and her life spiraled out of control.

"The ministry took my son away when he was six and a half," she says. "And I was diagnosed with schizophrenia."

Abandoned by everyone, Rose was forced to sell all her possessions in order to clear arrears in rent.

With assistance from the Native Friendship Centre, Rose was connected with a new psychiatrist who soon discovered that she had been misdiagnosed. Instead of schizophrenia, she was suffering from bipolar affective disorder.

On new medication to help control her dramatic mood swings, Rose moved into a new apartment in Fernwood and returned to Our Place for meals — and to volunteer.



**"I wanted to give back for all the free food," she says with a smile. "So I work on the reception desk every Friday."**

Rose finds that volunteering at Our Place helps to keep her grounded, and also allows her to stay connected with the street community that first opened its arms to her.

"I also wanted to know what (Executive Director) Don Evans was all about," she says, flashing another grin. "To see if he's a snake in the grass or a good guy." She pauses for dramatic effect before finishing. "He's a good guy."

As she was getting back on her feet, Rose faced her next challenge. She interviewed for a job at Thrifty Foods, and was hired.

**The dilemma? She didn't have the money to buy the store uniform.**

Fortunately, Our Place had recently created a *Hope Fund* with seed capital from the United Church Victoria Presbytery ProVision Fund. Designed to assist Our Place family members during a critical moment in their lives, the *Hope Fund* is there to ensure people don't miss out on life-changing opportunities.

"I approached (Outreach Manager) Jordan and told him about the job," says Rose.

"And, using the Hope Fund, Our Place bought me a nice, new uniform of crisp white shirt and black pants, while WorkBC provided slip-proof shoes."

With her uniform in place, Rose is now employed part-time as a cashier.

Today, Rose's son is 19 and facing his own set of challenges. Their reunion hasn't been easy, but Rose isn't giving up.

As a young college student, Rose didn't see a need to ponder her future, but now, as a 49-year-old mother, her only dream is, "to have a healthy relationship with my son."

With any luck, and with the support of Our Place, she can make that dream come true.

## BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF LOVE PROGRAM TODAY

OUR MONTHLY CIRCLE OF LOVE DONORS provide predictability. By spreading out your annual donations over 12 months, you help us plan and budget more effectively and reduce our mailing costs. We really couldn't do this without your help, and we thank everyone who participated in our recent phone campaign. For more information, call Peter Papagiannis, Development Officer, 250.388.7122 ext 258 or visit our new website at [ourplacesociety.com](http://ourplacesociety.com)



< PAUL LOOFS of Medical Missionaries International brings his passion and skill for eye care to Our Place to offer information about the health of our family members' eyes, offer tests for farsightedness, and provide free reading glasses for those who need them.

## FIRST AID FOR EYES

NEW AT OUR PLACE!

# Our Programs

## Expanding Winter Hours

**“Last winter, we saw a desperate need for Our Place to offer sustenance and warm reprieve in the hours before the overnight shelters opened.”**

“Providing a place of hope and belonging from morning until night, seven days per week, has been a goal of Our Place since the very beginning. And this winter, starting on Oct. 1, we’re finally going to do it,” says Executive Director Don Evans.

Our plan is to stay open until 9 p.m., seven days per week, with expanded programming, increased access to showers and computers, and more one-to-one contact with Outreach workers, housing advocates and counsellors.

In addition to the new evening hours, we will

be open all day Saturdays, Sundays and on statutory holidays. This will mean going from 55 hours to 92 hours per week.

“When extreme winter weather is forecast, we will also be transforming an area on the lower floor to accommodate up to 50 people who are homeless,” says Don.

“The Our Place family members are definitely excited,” says Outreach Manager Jordan Cooper. “It was heartbreaking during the winter when we closed our doors at five and, really, those men and women who live on the street had nowhere to go.”

Even the family members who are fortunate enough to have housing are embracing the extended hours, Jordan adds. “For many seniors and those who have mental or physical challenges, the social aspect of our Drop-In centre is vitally important.”

“We have the majority of the money in place to open longer hours during the winter,” says Don. “However, we still need to raise additional funds. Our ultimate goal is to offer these expanded hours throughout the year, which will require additional community support.”

Despite the financial challenges, Don offers up an encouraging smile, “The entire staff is driven and optimistic that we can make this a reality. And, just like the family, we’re looking to the future with excitement.”



## Our Donors

**“At my age, I don’t need anything – but Our Place does.”**

Sitting in her beautifully adorned living room, surrounded by books and a soothing view of Victoria’s Inner Harbour, Beverly Unger is a breath of fresh air.

A new donor to Our Place, Beverly was inspired to do something special for her milestone 90th birthday. So in lieu of presents, she asked her guests to make donations to Our Place instead.

“My granddaughter designed the birthday invitation,” she says proudly.

Vibrant and sharp-witted, Beverly is the type of grandmother most of us wish we had: interesting, bright, and with a sparkle of mischief in her eyes that speaks of a full and fascinating life.

“Giving to Our Place is like two gifts in one,” she says. “Not only do you get to help others, but it also feels good to be doing something important.”

As we enjoy a cup of tea, Beverly shares photos of the birthday party that brought so many of her family members to town from across North America.

The whole clan is a gorgeous sea of smiles and the love they have for each other practically leaps from the pages of the photo album.

Beverly and her husband, Robert, moved from Long Island, New York, to the slightly less metropolitan Salt Spring Island in the ‘70s. There, her husband opened a dental practise while Beverly continued her career in psychiatric social work. Married for 63 years, Robert passed away in 2007.

Blessed with a wonderful life, Beverly is all too aware that not everyone is so lucky. “That’s why I’m so encouraged that Our Place is there, to be family for so many.”



< **HANDSOME DAY:** In honour of Father’s Day, we hosted a special Handsome Day for all the men. We received some wonderful gift bags from **Victory Barber** that made everyone feel “extra handsome”, plus free haircuts and professional massage from volunteers, new socks and underwear, World Cup on TV, and door prizes. Thanks to Erin for organizing this event.

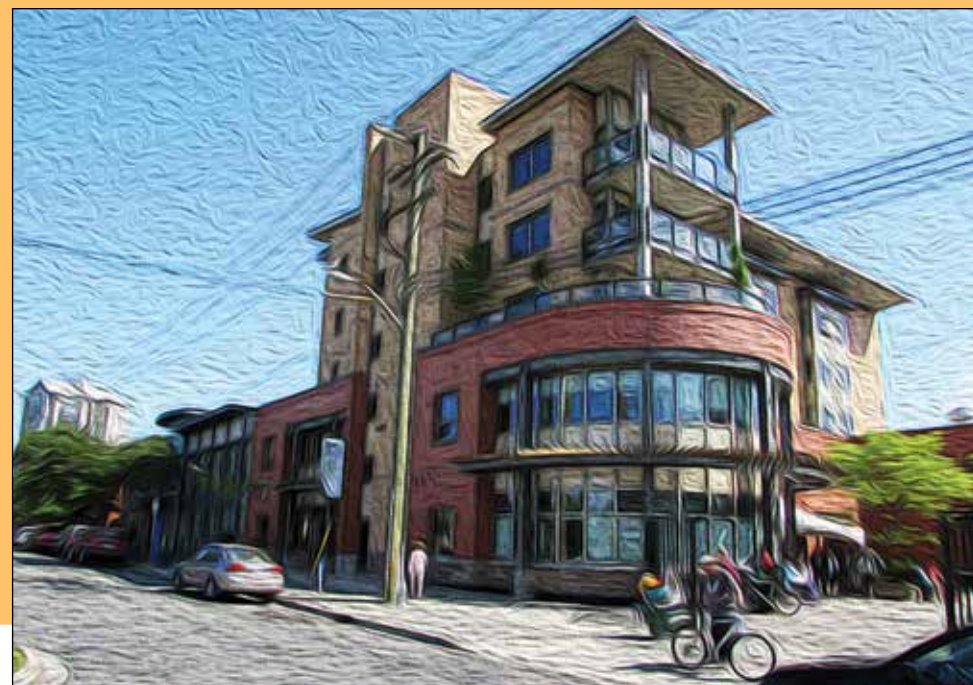


## Things We Need

- SOCKS & UNDERWEAR**
- GLOVES & SCARVES**
- TOQUES**
- WARM JACKETS**
- BLANKETS**
- SLEEPING BAGS**
- TENTS**
- DRY GOODS**
- FRUITS & VEGETABLES**
- TOILETRIES**

Winter is coming! Our fellow citizens in need will feel the cold and damp on the streets of Greater Victoria. Empty your closets and bring your warm coats and jackets, blankets and sleeping bags to Our Place. Donations of new underwear and socks are always greatly appreciated.

**Contact Tracy at 250-388-7112 ext. 259.**



## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE CHIPS TO OUR SALSA

**THERE ARE NEW VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES** in the evening and on weekends as Our Place extends its hours this winter. Become part of a dynamic team of compassionate people assisting Victoria’s most vulnerable citizens. To find out when the next volunteer orientation session is being held, call our **Manager of Volunteers Yvonne St John** at 250-388-7112 Ext. 243 or email [yvonne@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:yvonne@ourplacesociety.com).

## Creative Ways to Give

Our Place summer student Jacob with Haden Campbell



**SUMMER IS BBQ SEASON:** We love to roll out the BBQ on a summer day and fill the Our Place courtyard with the aroma of sizzling hamburgers. This year, we were treated to several BBQ events thanks to the support of **Aon Reed Stenhouse, 2 Burley Men Moving,** and local realtor **Haden Campbell.**

### Sponsor-a-Breakfast

This popular morale-boosting and team-building opportunity invites your group to sponsor and serve a warm, nutritious morning meal to kick-start the day for 300 family members. Our talented kitchen staff prepares a nutritious, cooked breakfast. A \$500 fee covers the cost of the food, and we encourage an extra donation to help fund operations.



**For more information, visit our website or contact Tracy at 250-388-7112 ext. 259.**

### Donor comes Clean

Like most charities, Our Place has a "wish list" of items that would make serving the poor of Greater Victoria a little bit easier. One day, Michael, who comes to Our Place for meals, showers and occasional support during a difficult period in his life, overheard us talking about the need to recycle blankets for people living on the street. Michael had an idea about someone who would want to make a difference . . . his father, Frank Neate. Within weeks of hearing about the need, Frank wrote a cheque for \$30,000 and we began transforming the laundry area to accommodate new, industrial-sized machines. Now, our family members can replace their wet, dirty blankets regularly as needed.

## Our Place Special Events

### Unlock The Treasure

**Sunday, Sept. 28, 2014**

Get your antiques and collectibles appraised at View Royal Casinos from 10am - 5pm with 10% of proceeds going to support Our Place.

### Thanksgiving Meal

**Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2014**

**11:30am to 2:00pm**

Along with local dignitaries, we're serving a traditional Thanksgiving feast.

### A Christmas Carol

**Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014**

Our Place and CBC present Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* at Alix Gooden Hall. Doors open at 6:30pm.

### Christmas Meal

**Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2014**

**11:30am to 2:00pm**

Along with local dignitaries, we're serving a traditional Christmas feast.

### Save The Date

## Hungry Hearts

**February 25, 2015**

You don't want to miss this premiere fundraising event for Our Place. After a successful inaugural event in 2014, an even larger venue, **The Inn at Laurel Point**, will graciously host **Hungry Hearts 2015** presented by PwC. We would love to have you be a part of this special evening! See our website for more details.



**Hope and Belonging**

**Visit our new website: [ourplacesociety.com](http://ourplacesociety.com)**

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