

Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2014

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Recently, we received generous contributions that have assisted us to expand our programs and extend our hours.



Hope and Belonging

Executive Director's Message

A new year is always the perfect time for reflection, to give thanks for the foundation upon which we stand and the love that helps us grow.

Having witnessed this past year of accomplishment and growth at Our Place, I can honestly say that my cup runneth over with gratitude and joy for the people I've met, the friends I've made, and the generosity of everyone involved in creating a home for the most vulnerable citizens of Greater Victoria.

Like all meaningful things, there have been challenges met, obstacles overcome, and more of each on the horizon, but nothing compares to the gifts I have received.

Connecting with our family members on an individual level, I have come to know each of them as being full of love, compassion and gratitude. Their gifts and talents shine through whether in a casual chat over coffee or by participating in choir, art or computer class.

At Our Place, we offer food and shelter, and a hand up to those struggling on our streets. Seeing a life transformed is the biggest reward of all for me.

As we move forward, towards our goal of fully utilizing our wonderful facility in the heart of downtown Victoria, I also give thanks to the accomplishments we have achieved in the past year.

Many family members have transitioned successfully through our housing program



to independent living; we have doubled our programs offered through new partnerships and collaborations; and we have expanded our hours to provide meals and shelter on weekends and statutory holidays.

This winter, we have also kept our doors open through the night as part of the province's Extreme Weather Response program and seen our drop-in area fill with people seeking shelter from the cold.

Extending our hours and expanding our programs has been challenging for our volunteers and staff, but like everything we do at Our Place, the reward makes it all worthwhile.

Warm Regards,

Don Evans
Executive Director



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 over the past year would not have been possible without the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters. Thank you!



Our Recent Events

A Christmas Carol

A wonderful time was had by all at Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* presented by CBC and Our Place in December.

The Alix Goolden Hall was filled with singing and festive joy as Dickens' masterpiece was read by CBC personalities Gregor Craigie, Khalil Akhtar, Shelagh Rogers, Kelly Nakatsuka, Jo-Ann Roberts, Bob McDonald and Arthur Black.

Choir director Louise Rose (pictured above) led the Open Door Choir @ Our Place and The Victoria Good News Choir in getting every one of the over 400 audience members to his or her feet to join in festive song.

Beauty Day

At Our Place, the ability to put a smile on someone's face (such as family member Karen in the photo above) is one of the wonderful benefits of what we do. Smiles were all around when we hosted a special **Beauty Day** for family members, offering haircuts, manicures, makeovers and complimentary trinkets. Plus everyone received a special goodie bag full of beauty essentials. Special thanks go to Erin for organizing this wonderful day.

Angel Gifts

Our multi-purpose chapel was bulging with Christmas gifts for family members this year. Through the generosity of local churches, schools, community groups and government offices, Our Place distributed over 800 presents to people who otherwise would have had nothing. The presents were provided by the generosity of the community through the Angel Gifts program.

Downtown Story Collective Show

Our Place family members put on a special show at Dales Gallery at the end of November when the **Downtown Story Collective** launched its first book and art show with a special event.

The large canvas, shown right, is a collaborative painting produced by 15 people over a number of months. Many other pieces were also on display, including a collaborative piece comprised of different paintings and poems that address themes of "seasons" — be they in nature or life.



To find out more about events, visit ourplacesociety.com and click on *Upcoming Events*.



DUKE ELLINGTON'S SACRED MUSIC: For its return visit to Victoria, Duke Ellington's Sacred Music fundraiser surpassed our expectations with a wonderful night of inspirational and soulful jazz. This year's concert was held at the spacious Farquhar Auditorium at the University of Victoria with over 800 people in attendance, including many family members, donors, supporters, volunteers and staff. Our WestJet raffle was won by John Pettigrew.

Our Family

Gordie's Story

"What I'm scared of, terrified of, is that I'm going to go back to it. But I don't want to go back," says family member Gordie about his 30-year addiction to drugs.

What's remarkable about Gordie's statement is the strength he shows every day to stay sober after battling his addiction for three decades.

"I had a rough life," he says in a soft voice, and the pain glistening in his eyes speaks volumes.

He left Montreal as a young man and moved west, working the same janitorial job in a hospital for 30 years, while trying to keep his addiction a secret.

But the secret, as most addicts will attest, became a nightmare of destructive thoughts that left Gordie wishing, "I wasn't around anymore because then the pain will stop."

Eventually, Gordie reached a point when he wanted to change.

"I still crave it," he admits, but thanks to the support he's found at Our Place — especially from David, his Resident Support Worker — he's been clean now for five months.

"It's remarkable," says David. "Gordie is

learning the life skills he needs to be a vibrant member of his community again."

"Last time I did drugs," says Gordie, who has been with Our Place since it opened its doors, "I knew I needed help, and I turned to David."

"Those are the magic words," says David. "You can't do it by yourself. Somebody else has to be the quarterback and that's what the team at Our Place does."

With the support of Our Place, Gordie has made some remarkable strides. He's learning how to budget, returned to school, paid his own way through a detox and stabilization program, purchased new glasses and had dental problems fixed.

"We don't get a lot of people who pay their own way," says David proudly.

The bond between these two men is palpable as they both know what it's like to be living on the street. With his bright smile and confident air, it's hard to imagine that David once walked the same painful path as Gordie.

But it's that street knowledge that makes David so easy to talk to. He doesn't judge anyone because he's been there and he understands how each day of sobriety is something to celebrate.

LEAVE A LEGACY

BECOME AN ANGEL OF HOPE TODAY

Stories like Gordie's are happening all around us at Our Place. Please consider becoming an 'Angel of Hope' and ensure your compassion will make a lasting difference in the lives of hurting people. By contributing a LEAVE A LEGACY gift, you become an Angel of Hope for years to come. If you let us know you are considering leaving a legacy by donating a portion of your estate to Our Place, we will be sure to invite you to our inaugural **Angel of Hope Springtime Tea** on Sunday, March 23rd. For more information call Laura Walsh, Director of Development, 250.388.7122 ext 231



David and Gordie

"Without David's support, I wouldn't be here," admits Gordie, who still suffers from debilitating nightmares and social anxiety. "I nearly died five times from drug overdoses."

"Our Place gives people a place to step back from the storm," says David. "And our job is to make it a safe environment, free from drugs, so that people can get help and learn the tools they need to succeed."

Asking for help is just the first step in a long recovery process. Before entering detox, for example, Gordie went through a six-month series of weekly medical treatments. The grueling procedure is similar to chemotherapy for cancer, but David was with him every step of the way.

Along with money management, group and individual therapy, Gordie is also learning about healthy eating and diet, a skill that is easy to overlook, but is essential for staying healthy.

"He wants to eat well," says David with his trademark smile, "we're simply showing him how it's done."

As Gordie continues to improve day-by-day, he can, for the first time, begin to look ahead to the next step of graduating from the transitional housing program and finding a place of his own.

Before that, however, he wants to finish school and do some volunteering at Our Place to help others who face the same difficulties.

"Gordie did all this work," says David. "And there are many more just like him who need our help, too. We just need

to find a way to reach them."

The 45 adult residents living in transitional housing at Our Place have access to so much more than shelter.

With the guidance and support of the residential support workers and the mental health and addiction clinician, residents develop life skills and reach healthy goals that enable them to live rich, full and independent lives.

During this past fiscal year, over 20 people, ranging in age from 19 to 74, bid farewell to Our Place upon successfully transitioning to homes elsewhere in the Greater Victoria area.

Residential Support workers continue to support former residents transitioning to independent living.

Grief and loss affects everyone, but when you're living on the street, the sheer number of loved ones who can be taken at any moment is staggering. On average, Our Place holds a memorial service for family members two to three times per month. To help people deal with this loss, Our Place offers Bereavement Counselling in partnership with Victoria Hospice that is conducted in either one-to-one or group sessions. Our staff chaplain and a volunteer pastoral care team provide additional grief and loss support.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

SOMEONE TO LISTEN

Our Programs

Health Services

- Acupressure
- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic
- Dental Hygiene
- First Aid
- Foot Care
- Grief & Loss Support
- Hot Showers
- Massage Therapy
- Psychotherapy
- Street Nurses
- Veterinary Care



“I wouldn’t be able to survive without it,” says family member Tony.

For family member Tony, access to health services at Our Place has changed his life.

“I wouldn’t be able to survive without it,” he says. With chronic arthritis, Tony is a regular patient of acupuncture with Alexandria Miller, and acupressure practitioner Gordon Hawkins.

Alex, another family member, agrees. “It helps me manage chronic pain,” he says, adding that he is also a regular with our chiropractor, Dr. Cale Copeland.

All of the health services at Our Place are provided at no cost to family members by volunteers and professionals from the medical and health community.

Alexandria (pictured above with family member Faye) works at Victoria Massage Therapy & Health Solutions, and volunteers her time at Our Place because, “You get to

hold everyone’s hand, and it’s such a strong connection.”

That connection is also something that inspires Gordon. Twenty years ago, Gordon arrived at Our Place as a family member in need of support. Schizophrenia, a mental disorder characterized by a breakdown of thought processes and impaired emotional responses, had taken its toll and he had nowhere else to turn. But fast forward to today and he’s now a certified practitioner of Chinese 5 Elements Acupressure who volunteers several days a week treating our family members.

Other health services to be found here include: chiropractic, dental hygiene, first aid, flu shots, foot care, massage therapy, psychotherapy, and much, much more.

“A lot of people at Our Place have never been touched in a healthy way before — in a way that is respectful,” says acupressure practitioner Gordon Hawkins.

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE FUEL OF OUR ORGANIZATION.

Become part of a dynamic team of compassionate people assisting Victoria’s most vulnerable citizens. Register today for a volunteer orientation on one of the following Thursdays: Jan 16 & 30 | Feb 13 & 27 | March 13 & 27 | April 10 & 24 | May 8 & 22. Sessions run from 10 am to Noon.

Please call our volunteer manager at 250-388-7112 ext. 243 or email: volunteer@ourplacesociety.com.



Our Volunteers

Cutting hair is more than a service, it creates a sense of community.

Heather Dewey began volunteering at Our Place as part of the crew who dish out hot coffee and snacks at our main floor Nutrition Bar, but when she saw the facilities available in our busy hygiene area she had a fresh idea.

With experience running her own home-based salon, Heather (pictured top left) suggested that we provide free haircuts for our family members.

And in the two years since Heather first brought her scissors to Our Place, her Tuesday morning salon has provided well over 2,000 haircuts.

Joined by stylist Tracy Robinson (pictured top right), Heather's biggest joy is the look on her customers' faces.

"It feels wonderful," says family member Pattie, who adds, "Heather always listens to what I want."

"It's so rewarding," says Heather. "And creates a real sense of community."

Tracy agrees, smiling when she adds, "I look forward to Tuesdays. My dad always told me if you find a job you really love, you're willing to do it for free."

With proper barber chairs donated by Victory Barbers, the Our Place salon, located in the hygiene area, has become such a busy hive that more volunteer hairdressers are always welcome.

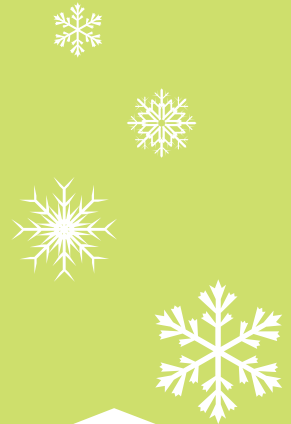
"We're so busy that we never get through all the haircuts," says Heather. "But every customer always leaves happy."

Expanded Hours

Our Place opens hygiene area one hour earlier.

Waking up in the cold and damp of a doorway or park before the sun has risen is something most of us would never imagine, but for the most vulnerable citizens of Greater Victoria, this is reality.

To help people get a warm and cleansing start to their day, Our Place has recently expanded its hours and opened the doors to its hygiene area at 8 a.m. — one hour earlier than in the past.



Things We Need

**WARM JACKETS
BLANKETS
SLEEPING BAGS
DRY GOODS
FRUITS
VEGETABLES
TOILETRIES**

WINTER IS HERE! 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 greatly appreciated.

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



< **THE GUARDIANS:** Talented local artist and Our Place supporter, George Williams, paints one of the four pairs of wolves that now decorate four pillars in our dining hall. The wolf symbolizes Family, Guardianship and Togetherness. As wolves mate for life and live in close family units, they are regarded as a family-oriented symbol in West Coast Native culture. In George's art, the wolves' tails curl to form a heart.

Creative Ways to Give



THE BIG LATKE LUNCH: To celebrate Hanukkah – the Jewish Festival of Lights – eager and excited volunteers of the Congregation Emanu-El took over the kitchen at Our Place on Friday, Nov. 29 for The Big Latke Lunch. With platefuls of delicious, crisp potato latkes served alongside generous dollops of sour cream and apple sauce to accompany a hearty soup, the Avodah Social Action Group turned an afternoon meal into a true event.

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 up to 300 family members. Options include: pancakes, sausages and coffee for \$375, or scrambled eggs, ham, potatoes and coffee for \$450. Lunches and dinners can also be sponsored.



Monthly Donor Program

Monthly donors are the heartbeat

of hope and belonging at our Place. We love knowing we can count on our friends of the family throughout the year. Donations are automatically withdrawn each month, ensuring ease and consistency. All contributions are gratefully received, with no minimum amount required.

Donate your Shoppers Drug Mart Optimum Points

Our Place can purchase toiletries and first-aid supplies with your Shoppers Optimum points. Click the "Donate" button on our website and choose "Other Ways To Give"

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

Our Place Special Events

Hungry Hearts

Thursday, Feb. 27, 2014

A savoury fundraiser for Our Place with top Victoria chefs serving gourmet soup, plus entertainment, live and silent auctions.

Benefit Concert

Friday, Feb. 28, 2014

Daniel Lapp and special guests will perform a benefit concert at the First Metropolitan United Church.

Community Easter Meal

Thursday, April 17, 2014

11 am - 2 pm

A special festive meal served by local dignitaries, volunteers and staff.

For more upcoming events, please visit our website: ourplacesociety.com



Giving Thanks — for a special donation

Thank you to the United Way for a generous \$30,000 gift that has enabled us to open our facility on Sunday afternoons.

This expansion of hours provides Sunday access to our Drop-In Centre, Nutrition Bar, hot showers, free clothing, and more.



Hope and Belonging

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