

# OUR PLACE SOCIETY

2019-2020 IMPACT REPORT FOR DONORS



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# Overview

The 2019-2020 fiscal year was an exciting time of growth and opportunity for Our Place Society, and saw several projects long in the making grow into fully operational services for vulnerable people. The people using our services, who we call family members, have had access to more support today than ever before.

The year was also marked by several challenges, including the departure of CEO Don Evans, after more than seven years of dedicated service, and the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic which has come to define the start of our new fiscal year in 2020/21.

Under these circumstances, we hope this report will help highlight the achievements here at Our Place Society over the past 12 months, and provide context for the inevitable changes and challenges of the year ahead.

**This report will cover a range of programs and services provided by Our Place Society.**

- » Meals
- » Outreach
- » Health and Hygiene
- » Volunteer Coordination
- » Seniors Services
- » Employment Preparation
- » New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community
- » COVID-19 Response and Future Plans



# Nourishing Change

Throughout 2019 Our Place Society continued to serve three meals per day, every day of the year, and snacks at the Nutrition Bar between meals. Averaging 1,280 meals per day, we served over 467,000 meals in this fiscal year.

In the Our Place Society dining hall we provide so much more than a meal. The meal program provides a safe place to meet with friends, find community, and connect to services. A series of fall focus groups were conducted by Director of Programs and Services Holt Sivak, who is also a trained community psychologist. He met with almost 100 family members, and found over 90% of them first came to Our Place Society for a meal before accessing other supports.

We negotiate bulk food and local sources for purchases to average \$3.11 a meal plus we distribute snacks and tea and coffee between meals, at the Nutrition Bar, seven days a week.



Meals at Our Place Society are free thanks to your support. We partner with the Farmlands Trust to pick up their garden produce as often as possible. The Our Place dining room and Nutrition Bar are places where Victoria's most vulnerable celebrated seasonal holidays over a shared meal, connected to supports, felt a sense of belonging. We hope to welcome folks back soon!.

## Sponsored Meals

Sponsored Meals provide an opportunity for local businesses, churches, services clubs and community organizations to contribute to our vision of nourishment, hope and belonging for all.

A sponsored meal includes paying for some of the food costs, and providing volunteers to serve the meal. This both contributes to feeding the most vulnerable in our community, while also building empathy and breaking down barriers. In 2019-20, over 150 businesses and community groups participated in sponsored meals to add to BC Gaming and Food Share and private a Foundation's support for 50% of the costs.





## Outreach

The Our Place Society drop-in center at 919 Pandora acts as a community centre, and is the heart of our services. In 2019-2020, we achieved a milestone of bringing people in from the elements, and opened our doors for extended hours all 12 months of the year.

Open from 6:30am-9:00pm seven days per week, the drop-in center is a safe place for hundreds of people to rest, recharge and connect to outreach workers. This service is particularly valued by family members, seniors and others experiencing homelessness, isolation and severe poverty. While many will use the drop in as a safe place to sit, relax and connect with their community, they also have access to a wide range of services provided by a team of professional outreach workers, six of whom are paramedics, and caring volunteers.

Here are just a few of the services provided by the Our Place drop-in center this year:

- » ID Clinic – replacing lost or stolen ID
- » Housing referrals – to shelters, supported housing, and landlords
- » Counselling and spiritual care by Chaplains, an Elder, and volunteers
- » Mail Delivery – Over 400 individuals without a fixed address use the Our Place Drop-In center as their official mailing address
- » Phone calls and messages for family members who use OPS as their phone number
- » Almost half a million servings of coffee, tea and snacks at the Nutrition Bar for those arriving between meals
- » Wifi and computer Access and library book loans in the learning lab
- » Distribution of bus passes (thanks to the Gifts with Vision United Church program!)
- » On site Paramedic to respond to overdoses, first aid and other medical emergencies

## Paramedic Outreach



***Here, Jonathon conducts a wellness check on a family member, diverting costs and an ambulance trip to the Emergency room.***

Hiring outreach workers who are also paramedics for shifts daily is a new development at 919, and starting in March 2019, also at My Place.

The Harbour operates a supervised consumption site next door, but its staff does not venture outside that facility, so our paramedics have been first responders with overdose treatments almost daily

These outreach staff have saved dozens of lives this past year alone.

## Safe Storage



In summer 2019, with support from the City of Victoria, Our Place Society opened the city's first safe storage facility.

Providing a secure place to store personal belongings, this storage facility helps 88 people secure their possessions to go to work, appointments or just to relax for once. Each box is filled with the life necessities the rest of us keep in our homes.

Learn more at:  
<https://www.ourplacesociety.com/safe-storage>

## Health and Hygiene

When Our Place Society opened in 2009, we increased the number of public toilets available to homeless adults in Victoria by 900%. For our "family" members who are chronically or episodically homeless, Our Place hygiene services are a source of dignity, comfort and healthcare.

In 2019-20, Our Place Society provided over 16,000 showers, in 30 minute bookings of our four shower stalls, which is very near to our maximum daily capacity. We secured a selection of hygiene products and clean clothes and shoes. Personal attention is provided by volunteer professionals, including footcare, dental hygiene, haircuts, and healing acupressure treatments and Reiki. We used to close the Care Corner at 3 p.m. daily but due to demand for evening shift workers living in SROS without showers, we expanded our hours to 6 p.m. in early 2020, to ensure 12 more people have access to a shower daily.

The Hygiene center in the downstairs distributes toothbrushes, razors, and most importantly feminine hygiene products. We partnered with Soap for Hope, and United Way Greater Victoria, schools, the CUPE provincial convention and many donors to obtain many of these items. These essential supplies are available to people whose income assistance, disability allowance, or working wages are not sufficient to meet their needs.

Telus Future is Friendly Foundation delivered a mobile check-up service often, through funding the Doctors of the World van and staff, at 919 Pandora's front door.



# Volunteers

As always, Our Place Society is a volunteer driven organization, and nothing we do would be possible without the hundreds of volunteers who contribute every day to the work being done in our organization. In 2019, over 800 individual volunteers contributed over 40,000 hours this year.

OPS hired a new volunteer manager after former coordinator was elected to a seat on Victoria City Council. With a Vital Victoria grant from the Victoria Foundation, the new manager and her assistant have revised the intake, screening, training and evaluation protocols for Our Place, as posted on our website here: <https://www.ourplacesociety.com/get-involved/orientations>. Dawn Barr conducted an extensive survey; some of the results are shown below.

Where in the past the majority of volunteers were in food services, now we are seeing a growing number of volunteers supporting our employment program, therapeutic recovery, health and spiritual care. These new volunteer roles create opportunities for people to bring their professional skills and contribute to the wider community in a supported environment.

*VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE AN ESTIMATED ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN EQUIVALENT PAID \$*



# Focus on our Health Volunteers



Dr Pat (l) volunteers weekly to provide on-site first aid and referrals to the health care system. Our most dedicated medical volunteer, Dr Pat is a practicing physician who give her time freely to care for our city's most vulnerable patients. Donor Samantha Dickie (r) offered a matching challenge of \$10,000 to seed our 2020 safety campaign for medical supplies and paramedic staff on shift daily.



Every year, Dental Hygiene students from Camosun College come to Our Place Society and provide dental cleaning and check-ups for vulnerable adults. A service not covered by MSP, for many of our family members, this is their first dental cleaning since they were children.

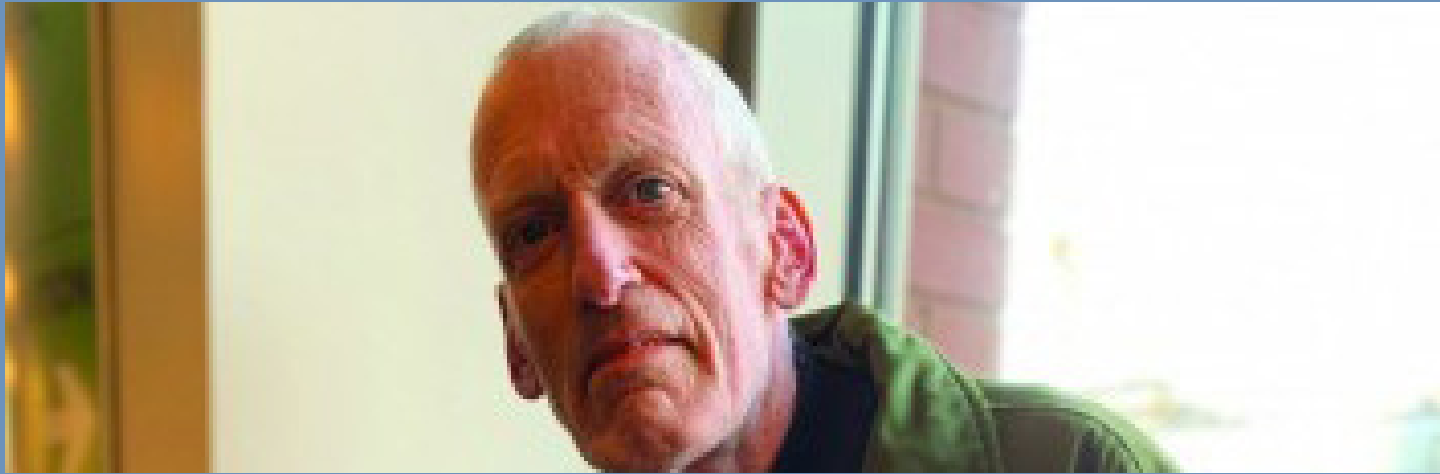


Footcare is something few of us think about in our daily lives, but for people who live outdoors, it can be a matter of life and death. Cold feet stuck in wet shoes all winter long with nowhere to dry out and warm up leads to infection, and even amputation. Volunteer nurses at Our Place provide footcare that saves lives.

Our Place has invested significant effort in defining new roles for volunteers across the organization. They serve in almost every aspect of our organization, as this **virtual tour video clip** of our downtown drop in centre shows: <https://www.ourplacesociety.com/get-involved/tours>



## Peers supporting Peers - Stingray's Story



Our Place continually watches for opportunities to provide meaningful work and volunteer opportunities to service users. 30% of our paid staff have lived experience on the street. Another third are recruited to volunteer, when readiness for additional responsibilities is apparent.

At 63, Stingray is finally finding a measure of peace in his life. A violent childhood led to a violent adulthood, but he has discovered a new purpose in giving back to those still suffering from addiction.

"The addicts listen to me," he says, "because I've been there. I know exactly what damage drugs can do."

Stingray lifts up his shirt to show a urostomy bag, a clear plastic collection device attached to his side where his bladder used to be.

"This is what crack cocaine does," he says matter-of-factly. "I had tumours on my bladder, lungs, kidneys . . . I show that to people in the Our Place Drop-In who are still using, and it makes them think. They'll ask 'is that going to happen to me?' I'm proof that it will."

Stingray turned away from alcohol and crack cocaine late in life, and began volunteering his time at Our Place as a way to help people caught in the cycle of addiction.

"Our Place totally made me a better person," he says. "It made me care, care for the family members, care for the staff, care for the other volunteers."

"This is my family now. I can arrive here grumpy, but as soon as I begin interacting with the family, they make me laugh, and I'm like a new person."

He continues: "I love the teamwork, love being able to help the staff, and love what they have done to help me. I love it, and I'm so proud to be here."

## Seniors

In 2019-20, programming for seniors was given a specific focus, with the 50+ connection club and a range of support services being put in place to support vulnerable seniors accessing Our Place services.

The average age of service users at Our Place Society in 2017 was 49 years old. The average age of death of persons who are street-involved is 47. How to engage and retain relationships with an aging, at-risk population became a focus.



The same survey identified senior isolation as a major concern for the older family members. Thanks to grants from the City of Victoria and the New Horizons for Seniors Program from the Government of Canada, a Seniors Programs Coordinator was recruited in 2018 to create a program for people over age 50.

In 2019-20, over 50 outings were organized exclusively for these seniors. Working collaboratively with a core group of seniors, the program ran trips to places their low (or no!) incomes could ever provide: the Royal BC museum, rural Metchosin, the Imax cinema, a housing complex for seniors, and hosted informational tables for seniors agencies and Elder abuse workshops. Several dozen concert tickets to local concerts were donated to the program, and a weekly social meet-up was arranged in the chapel.

The over 70 individuals who took part in these programs received personalized additional support from the program coordinator. This included help accessing housing, medical services, pensions, elder abuse, victim services and income assistance. The federal New Horizons for Seniors program, United Church of Canada Foundation, City of Victoria and the Windsor family were core supporters of this valuable outreach program.

## Seniors during COVID-19

A majority of 55+ club members have a safe place to live, so Halle (coordinator, pictured right) has been encouraging them to stay home. Halle provides a telephone call three times a week to check on their wellbeing. This is an opportunity to provide reassurance, phone companionship, and answer questions.





# Employment

The Next Steps to Employment program which started in 2018 has grown significantly in 2019.

Responding to surveys of our family members, Our Place Society has since 2017 put a major focus on creating opportunities to access employment and training.

One highlight in 2019 was the “Women in Progress” cohort, an employment training program specifically for vulnerable women. With a contribution from the Greater Victoria Community Savings Legacy Fund of Vancity, eight weeks of sessions were offered. Responding to feedback from women in our community, this life skills and job placement program served the needs of vulnerable women who did not feel comfortable in a group of men.

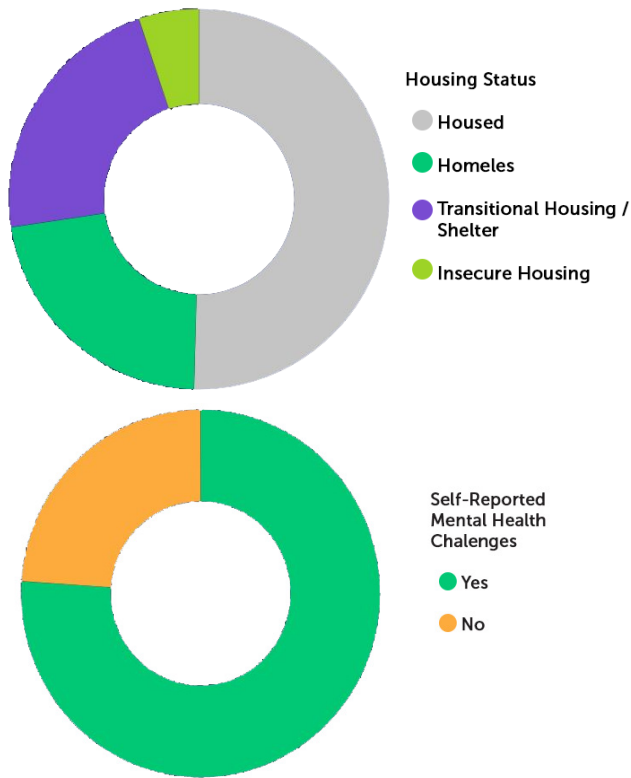
The Women in Progress cohort was a group of 14 women who met twice per week to develop employment skills, and provide peer support to help work towards new opportunities together.

Most important, the Next Steps to Employment program provides ongoing support. There are currently 40 clients continuing to receive ongoing support to retain employment.



## Employment Program Stats 2019

- » 126 Intake Assessments
- » 106 Clients Served
- » 70% completion rate
- » 54% of participants moved into employment
- » 22 employer partners
- » 9 volunteer trainers providing weekly employment workshops



## Referral Partners sending clients to NSTE

St. Vincent de Paul - Victoria Brain Injury Society - Vancouver Island Forensic Psychiatric Regional Clinic Services - Cool Aid - My Place - Wear 2 Start - Work BC - ACT - VIHA - PEERS - Glad Tidings Church - Together We Can

# New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community

In 2019-20, the New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community grew significantly. First opening in 2018, the program responds to the cycle of homelessness and incarceration by providing a 24-month residential care program for adults suffering with addiction.

A year of growth and development, this year included a radical renovation of both the indoor and outdoor spaces that house the Therapeutic Recovery Community. The program grew from 10% capacity at the start of the year to 50% capacity, a significant growth for a program based on peer-to-peer support and leadership. Intake had to be postponed due to the extensive renovations undertaken by Herowork volunteers for three months. More than 300 people attended the “Radical Reveal” of an urban garden, seeded by a major gift of a private donor, and upgraded facilities, in July. A sweat lodge and fully equipped fitness room (thanks to the Flaman Foundation and another private donor) and weekly yoga classes were added in the fall.

The growth and development of the program is simply too great to capture in this report. A year of building networks within the integrated courts and corrections systems, developing programs and building a community of care and support for people in recovery, the New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community is on track to be one of the highest impact addiction recovery programs available on Vancouver Island.

More photos, a video interview with a former participant and the former CEO, with further details about this program is available at <https://www.ourplacesociety.com/how-we-help/therapeutic-recovery-community>.



## Work as Therapy Program

At the heart of the Therapeutic Recovery Community is the concept of ‘work as therapy’, where program residents build skills, confidence and a sense of purpose by performing meaningful work inside the program.

All residents of the program are part of a work team, and grow food, maintain the building, run the kitchen, provide social activities, clean and so much more. To facilitate this work, several private donors have stepped forward to provide infrastructure like a commercial greenhouse, chicken coops, and much more.

# COVID-19 and Pandemic Response

It is important not to let the pandemic overshadow the accomplishments of the past 12 months. However, the final months of the 2019-2020 fiscal year and the global pandemic crisis is clearly re-defining the role that Our Place Society plays in our community.

Vulnerable people are by definition the hardest hit in times of crisis. Those who don't have savings, homes, or personal resources to respond to the crisis are at highest risk. In March 2020, Our Place had to close its Drop in Centre to make room for 30 people to move over from the First Met shelter, to comply with social distancing rules limiting group sizes and sleeping protocols. Three levels of government have been seeking indoor shelter spaces since that time, so we provided tents and sleeping bags to those who had no place to stay safe at "home".

## Our Place March 2020 Statistics



Our Place Society was declared an essential service, and has managed to provide meals outreach, health, hygiene and other basic needs throughout the pandemic. The outdoor location for homeless persons, operated by the Victoria Coalition to end Homelessness and Dandelion Society, at City-owned land at Topaz Park was full within two weeks of opening. 200 structures remain on Pandora St, housing people displaced by shelter closing and huddled together for access to the Harbour and OPS services. We now are on the triage team, advising on housing options and wraparound services for people we know from the street community. You were there, too, by supporting our efforts. Thank you.

