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Hope and Belonging

We thank Mail-O-Matic for donating resources to print this colour newsletter

Message from Julian

A new year is a great time to count our blessings and look back on the past with gratitude.

Nobody knows what a year will bring, but since arriving at Our Place, I have come to know that the staff and volunteers here are incredibly dedicated to making sure that, above all else, we never lose sight of the vulnerable people we care for.

In 2021, that hard work and dedication meant that some 500 people who were struggling without housing were moved indoors. It also meant that our team grew as we took over management of numerous hotels, shelters and kitchens.

And when people moved into their new room or shelter bed, that's when the real work started. The work we do isn't just about providing a warm, dry bed – although that is incredibly important – it's about meeting individual needs, helping folk improve, even transform, their lives.

For some that is giving them space to rest after months or years of struggling to survive. It's about proper nutrition to build back their bodies and clear the fog in their brains. It's about dealing with addiction issues by providing support as they enter detox and therapeutic recovery. For others, it's assessing their mental health needs and helping them make a plan.

Communities grow from these seeds. And like a garden, it needs to be tended carefully. There are some people who find a hotel room too isolating, so we need to move them to a community setting such as a shelter. There are some whose mental

health has disintegrated to the point where they need more complex care than we have the ability to offer, and so we work with our health partners to find other solutions. And there are some who simply need time to find their way.

We aren't perfect, and I see people every day who are still struggling. I see men who have lost all trust in others, and I see women too traumatized to seek shelter.

But I know, we won't stop trying to reach them. It's not in our DNA to give up, so we'll keep soldiering on, reaching people where they're at and trying our best to give them all the support they need. And through it all, I appreciate the support our community and donors provide. Without that support, our job would be impossible.

With much gratitude,

Julian Daly
Chief Executive Officer



Hope & Belonging at Our Place



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 many programs and services offered are only possible with the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters like you. Thank you!



FESTIVE FUN: Even during a time of pandemic, Our Place staff, volunteers and donors go that extra step to make sure the vulnerable people we serve are offered a taste of family festivity and a glimmer of hope for the future.

Our Family

Mikala's Story

“Trauma and shame is multi-generational. I carried that as if it was my own.”

After surviving on the streets of Victoria for 10 years, Mikala finally found the strength and determination to change her life.

“I died three times,” she says of her former life where she was addicted to crack cocaine and alcohol. “All three times I was by myself, but divine intervention brought me back.”

Her third overdose from a tainted drug supply was her lowest and scariest point.

“I don’t have memory of it, but some random passerby called the paramedics. I was grey, my eyes had rolled into the back of my head.”

This near-death experience haunted Mikala and she immediately applied to enter treatment. It would be her fourth time.

“I was tired of fighting for my life each and every single day,” she says. “It took me to be dead before saying ‘Okay, maybe I should make some changes.’”

“My whole relapse was about shame,” she adds. “I created this monster in my mind that shamed me for my entire life. I didn’t think I was worthy of success.”

While she was in treatment, Mikala’s mother died of her own addiction. Instead of using it as an excuse to relapse, however, Mikala decided to dedicate her sobriety in honour of her mother.

“I loved my mom dearly,” she says. “And I am in the stage of recovery that I can now understand her choices.”

Sober and determined, the 42-year-old walked into Our WorkPlace to brush up her resume and seek employment. With Our WorkPlace and Our Place’s Hand Up program collaborating to offer supportive job opportunities, Mikala was referred to a custodian position where she was hired.

“I want people who knew me then to look at me now and be inspired,” she says. “I want them to know that it is possible, despite all the obstacles, to escape from that life.”

While she was on the streets, Mikala used a lot of Our Place services for meals, shelter, showers, clothing and more.

And while she tried supported housing, Mikala admits she “was a very angry girl” and often came to loggerheads with staff.

It is that lived experience, however, that is fueling her desire to help others.

“I’ve lived on these streets,” she says. “I know the pain, anger, stress and fear that people



are going through.”

Mikala grew up in Esquimalt with a mother who experienced substance misuse, and that has impacted some of her childhood memories.

“I was a little girl with adult issues, not knowing what was really going on,” she says.

When she turned 12, Mikala’s inherited addiction began to rear its head.

“Alcoholism runs rampant on both sides of my family,” she says. “I didn’t know much about my dad’s side, I didn’t meet him until I was 12, but a lot of my stuff happened after I met him.”

Mikala lost interest in school, her grades dropped, and things became really rough at home. By the time she was 15, Mikala began experimenting with alcohol and marijuana.

After high school, Mikala worked a variety of jobs before moving to Calgary in 1998 with her boyfriend. There, Mikala found

her relationship with substance misuse deepening. When the relationship broke up, Mikala returned to Victoria, but brought her addiction to cocaine with her.

“Cocaine destroyed my life,” she says.

Mikala struggled to hold a job and kept getting evicted from her housing for failure to pay rent.

“I’d be working and blow my cheque on drugs instead of paying rent. I’d call my mom to bail me out, and this cycle just continued on and on and on.”

As life became more and more difficult, Mikala entered treatment for the first time in 2010, but as soon as she finished the 28-day program, she returned to drugs and the street.

“I didn’t understand the extent of my addiction,” she says. “It took me a few times of falling down and picking myself back up

before realizing what my addiction was all about. I felt trapped. Trapped by my addiction. Trapped by the system. This time, I was determined to find my way out.”

Mikala taps into that pain and experience as she looks to the future with a sober and clearer vision.

“Everything’s been falling into place,” she says. “Working at Our Place is an opportunity to give back to the place that helped keep me alive for so many years.”

Determined to stay the path, Mikala has now enrolled in Camosun College to upgrade her education with an eye towards a career helping others. She looks forward to honouring her one year of sobriety on March 13th, 2022.

BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR



JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF LOVE PROGRAM TODAY

Why not join the many donors who have chosen to give monthly? This eco-friendly method ensures the money saved on printing and mailing goes directly to providing food and services for people in need. Plus, you get more control over your giving because you can cancel or alter your gift at any time. And, we’ll send you one receipt for your annual donation in time for filing your tax return. Interested? Please call our philanthropy team at 250-940-5060 or visit ourplacesociety.com/donate/monthly to sign up.



< FUN TIMES - George Jay Elementary School students were rewarded for collecting and donating 1,100 pairs of socks by pummeling their teachers! Even better than a snowball fight! Warm thanks from all of us at Our Place.

TOASTY TOOTSIE TOSS

GEORGE JAY ELEMENTARY

New Program

Dandelion Street Outreach

Our Place is known for its community drop-in centre on Pandora Avenue. It is one of the few places where anybody who is struggling with homelessness can find the help they need.

But there is another portion of the street community who are hunkered down in isolated spots around the Greater Victoria area that need just as much help.

To reach them, Our Place has launched a new program: **Dandelion Street Outreach at Our Place.**

Following in the footsteps of Dandelion Society, which was operated by Rev. Al Tysick before his retirement, Our Place has rebranded the Dandelion van and hired two outreach workers to continue this important work.



"The need has always been there," says Jordan Cooper, director of facilities for Our Place. "And we wanted to make sure that Rev. Al's legacy continued in a positive light."

The two outreach workers, Kim and Kai, hit the streets at 6:30 every morning and make their rounds to check up on people who are living in doorways, under hedges, and other isolated spots around the Capital Regional District.

"Building trust with people is the only way we can provide them with the services they need," says Jordan. "Fortunately, a lot of that is already in place as we're building on the legacy left behind by Dandelion."

Along with health checks, the outreach team delivers hot coffee, snacks, socks, underwear, rain gear, and other necessities. It also gives isolated people rides to medical appointments, laundry facilities, and other service providers.

"The number one issue is housing and how to access it," says Jordan.

The team connects people with resources, checks they are on the BC Housing list, and lets them know what shelters and warming stations are open that day.

"The people we see every day are those who have fallen through the cracks, and we want to lift them up," says Jordan. "Sometimes that's as simple as a coffee and snack, and other times it's helping them navigate the system to get into housing."

This new program is only possible through the continuing support of both Dandelion and Our Place donors. To support the program, call 250-940-5060 or email us at donors@ourplacesociety.com



Our Donors

Lynn Martin moved to Victoria from the Yukon in 2012, and was shocked at the number of people she saw begging and living on our city's streets.

"I spoke to many of them," she recalls. "And I heard heartbreaking stories of substance abuse, dangerous home lives, head injuries, and mental illness."

She adds, "Joan Baez has a song with the lyrics 'there but for fortune may go you or I', and I apply that thought to all those with difficulties or down on their luck. I also think humanity's best gift is to share, so my second mantra is 'if you have it, share it.'"

Lynn has put these words into direct action as a monthly supporter of Our Place for the past several years.

"Reverend Al Tysick's Dandelion Society, which I also supported, is now under the

wing of Our Place Society," Lynn points out, observing, "I am very grateful there are resources for the many, many needy people in Victoria, and I feel it's crucial to help keep this work going, so I do what I can."

The faithful support of monthly donors such as Lynn makes a big difference to those experiencing homelessness, poverty, and substance use disorder.

Feeling she could do even more to create a lasting impact, Lynn has also chosen to include a gift to Our Place Society in her will. Now, her legacy will be to provide food, shelter, services, and a hand up for others in the future.

Including a gift in your will is something anyone can do. It is a quick and easy process, and a great way to extend your values and impact beyond your lifetime.

If you would like to join Lynn in doing this, please discuss it with your family and your lawyer, and let us know of your intention so we can provide the information you need.

Contact Jonathan Dallison at either legacy@ourplacesociety.com or 250-940-5066.



Gratitude



Life-saving medical services for vulnerable community members were funded.



With Living Spirit Fund. Chapel renovations are complete, and volunteers will enhance spiritual care for all at Our Place.



Pandemic safety protocols were enhanced with a Great Neighbourhood Grant "Optimizing Health and Resilience for Vulnerable Communities."

Lynn Foundation

Emergency meals and outreach services were made available by Meals Plus sponsorship.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE SNAP/CRACKLE IN OUR POP

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS! We are still recruiting NEW volunteers and are looking forward to developing opportunities in new site locations in supportive housing. We also have a new online application and orientation process for safer and easier access to the Our Place volunteer experience. Please visit www.ourplacesociety.com/volunteer

LEGACY OF LOVE

A PLANNED GIFT CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

CREATE YOUR OWN LEGACY OF LOVE: After providing for your family, please consider including a gift to Our Place Society in your will to help our family members experiencing homelessness and poverty. Your bequest will extend your compassion and values to folks who will need a hand up in the future. Please contact Jonathan Dallison at 250-940-5066 or legacy@ourplacesociety.com for information.

SAVE THE DATE

Warm hearts on Cold night

Our Place Society and Pacific Centre Family Services Assn (PCFSA) have once again teamed up for the 2022 Coldest Night of the Year charity two and five kilometre walkathon.

Together, we are proud to offer families, faith, work, and community groups the opportunity to walk in solidarity and raise awareness and funds to help serve the hungry, homeless, and hurting people in our community.

- Enjoy family friendly activities both before and after the walk
- Join hundreds of compassionate members of our community participating in Canada's Fastest Growing Peer-to-Peer Fundraising campaign
- Warm up with hot food and drink on a cold winter's night
- If Covid restrictions warrant it, you have the option to show support and walk in your own neighbourhood
- Get a free gift card to Big Wheel Burger

Last year, our community helped us raise over \$150,000 between our two walk locations. With your support, this year we think we can beat it and make more of an impact on the



issues facing our neighbours in need!

Please consider gathering a team together and joining us on Saturday, Feb. 26 either in person or virtually.

To register please visit one of the following websites (those planning to walk virtually may visit either website):

Victoria Walk:

<https://cnoy.org/location/victoria/Pandora>

Westshore Walk:

<https://cnoy.org/location/victoriawestshore>

Our Place is here for individuals and families facing extreme challenges – regardless of the reason. Your support will ensure that we can continue to be a beacon for those in our region experiencing tough times.

If you are interested in creating a team, walking, or have any questions, please contact: Steven Seltzer at 250-940-5064 or stevens@ourplacesociety.com

Our Place Portraits



IT'S YOUR TURN: For the past two years, renowned local artist Elfrida Schragen has painted portraits of community leaders. This year, you have the opportunity to have a personal portrait done by Mrs. Schragen. Consider a portrait of a spouse, your children, other family members, treasured pets, CEO, board member etc. Each painting will cost between \$500 to \$1,500. What a wonderful way to immortalize someone you love! For more information, contact Steven Seltzer at stevens@ourplacesociety.com

Out of the Cold ❄️

The need to open our Drop-In floor and Nutrition Bar into the evening will add over \$200,000 to our annual budget. To make this possible, we need your help to keep vulnerable people warm, safe and fed during the cold, wet months ahead. If you can help with a financial donation, please **visit the website** or call:

250-940-5060 ❄️

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