



WINTER 2023

## IN THIS ISSUE

2.

Volunteer Profile:  
Sheryl Cooper

3.

Vee's Corner  
Portraits of Success:  
Randy  
PIP5 Graduation

4.

Upcoming Events  
Seen in Passing  
Shout Outs

### IN MEMORIAM

We remember Jesse.  
She brightened  
our lives, and we miss her.

## EVERYONE FINDS THEIR PLACE AT OUR WORKPLACE - EVEN THE DOGS!

**T**he role of dogs is often under-appreciated. However, we know that dogs can play an integral role in our lives, particularly in recovery and in dealing with stressful situations. Our WorkPlace has long been a welcoming place for dogs, whether they belong to staff or clients. In the case of the latter, having a dog wander into the classroom looking for treats or someone to play with often helps participants deal with anxiety. In this issue of the newsletter, we profile two of our dogs.

Winnie, the Boston Terrier, has been coming to work with her "person" since she was 12 weeks old.

She loves people and being the centre of attention. Her favourite place to sleep at Our WorkPlace is an avocado squishmallow.



**WINNIE**

*"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."*

**ROGER CARAS**

Ms. Fern is a 5-month-old Chihuahua, who, though new to Our WorkPlace has quickly established herself as the 'boss of her domain'!!



**MS. FERN**

### NOTE TO READERS:

This newsletter is produced by Our WorkPlace volunteers, with input from staff, clients, and supporters.

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE SHERYL COOPER

**A**s volunteers go, Sheryl Cooper is perhaps one of the most committed to supporting the clients and staff at Our WorkPlace, having been with us since the office opened almost 5 years ago.

Following her move to Victoria in 2017, Sheryl, a Registered Nurse, heard about “Next Steps” (now Our WorkPlace) while supervising nursing students at Camosun College doing their community placements in several sites around Victoria that support people struggling with poverty, mental health, and addictions. Seeing a need, she was motivated to find an organization where her skills and knowledge could be of use. The warm reception Sheryl received from program staff when she made enquiries told her that it was a good fit for her. In fact, it still is!

When we asked Sheryl what life experience she brings to the programs offered by Our WorkPlace, she told us that, as a nursing educator and as a Registered Nurse, she has worked in the community and supported students in community placements. “I have always been interested in working with people in environments where I can use my therapeutic self and partner with people on their journeys,” she says.

Previously, Sheryl taught classes on advanced communication skills and relational practice (essential skills for future nurses!). “I currently teach Community and Societal Health at UVic, where we explore and study topics such as capacity building, health equity, health promotion and maintenance and social determinants. I’m able to transfer this knowledge to the sessions I facilitate a part of the PIP program at Our WorkPlace (namely stress management and self-care).”

When facilitating workshops at Our WorkPlace, Sheryl strives to build on “creating community and a sense of belonging”, so that participants know that during and after the program that they are viewed as members of the community who are moving forward in their lives and believe in their own potential. “I want to respectfully meet folk where they are, to partner and to co-learn with them,” she says. “I may be the facilitator, but I also have so much to learn from the participants.” Sheryl stresses the importance of shining a light on the individual strengths and skills in the room, their wealth of knowledge and helping participants to recognize the transferable skills they already have to bring to paid employment.

When asked what Sheryl wants readers to know about the people taking part in workshops, she told us that they have the resiliency and strength to overcome significant barriers which many of us will never have to face. She appreciates their openness, humility and honesty when sharing their journeys together, along with their strong desire to enter the workforce, either as paid employees or as volunteers. “So often, folk who have experienced struggles with housing, disabilities and mental health are untapped resources,” she says.

When asked for a favourite anecdote from her time facilitating PIP workshops, Sheryl told us that she truly appreciates lively group discussions, during which excitement for the



*Sheryl Cooper*

future, along with the energy and support of one another are palpable. “I recall, when conducting a mock interview of a participant, being blown away by his re-discovered confidence, insight, and articulation of his abilities and extensive life and work experience. I would have offered him a job on the spot!” Her experience emphasized how, with the support and encouragement of the PIP program and close to being job ready, Our WorkPlace enriches the lives of its clients by effectively preparing them to meet the needs of employers and organizations. As she says, “everyone deserves this type of opportunity once ready to re-enter work.”

Sheryl told us that when she looks back over the five years since she started volunteering at Our WorkPlace, she realizes how far the program has come and how far it can still go. In terms of how she views the future of programs offered at Our WorkPlace, Sheryl would like to see an increase in the numbers and breadth of employers and organizations involved in the program to provide rich and varied work experience that can extend to paid work upon completion. She is also hopeful that consistent, stable funding will allow for program expansion at Our WorkPlace.

Away from Our WorkPlace, Sheryl enjoys socializing with family and friends, being in Nature, attending live performances, and travel (“now that we’re in a better place in the Pandemic!”) Sheryl loves exploring Vancouver Island with friends and her family’s Labrador but is also looking forward to going further afield this year. What this writer didn’t know about Sheryl is that she’s passionate about art and history. Furthermore, she’s happy to drag anyone – willing or not – around art galleries and museums!!

Some final words from Our WorkPlace Manager, Ashley – “I liked Sheryl as soon as I met her, and she’s become an integral part of our programming. For the first three years or so, she would complain to me (a lot!) that the workshop space was bland, cold, and lacked any personality. Of course, she was 100% right! After we got our first big mural and some other things on the wall, it was an obvious decision for us to name the room after her to honour her commitment to OWP. The room is known as The Cooper Room. People in Progress simply wouldn’t be what it is without Sheryl.”

The art of making  
someone feel seen  
and feel special  
is the highest art.

writemeanna

bliss

## VEE'S CORNER

One of the best things about writing for this newsletter is listening to the stories that people going through the programs at Our WorkPlace tell me. It has me thinking about that most universal of human needs; the importance of being seen and heard. As one person I interviewed recently said to me, "thank you for taking the time to listen to my story". Seems simple, right? All too often though, we don't always listen to the message behind the words. Being heard means that what we say is not only acknowledged but is seen as worthwhile to others in a deep and profound way. It helps us feel connected, less isolated, and better understood.

Vee

## PORTRAITS OF SUCCESS: RANDY



**T**he ways in which our workshop participants find their way to Our WorkPlace vary. In Randy's case, his friend Frank (a past participant in the People in Progress program) gave him a glowing review. So, Randy decided to check it out.

At the time, Randy was in the ARC program at the Salvation Army and was ready to build on his existing skills and re-enter the workforce. "With an eye injury, I had lost my ability to continue my 35-

year career as a professional mariner," says Randy. "Life didn't make sense, and I lost my way for a couple of years." However, through his ongoing self-development, the prospect of having daily purpose with financial gain led him to the People in Progress program.

Now a graduate of the 4th intake of People in Progress and using the connections he made with staff and facilitators at Our WorkPlace and the learned skills and certificates he's acquired, Randy sees the potential of working in an outreach role.

"Currently, I'm receiving the support I need to work through some personal development issues prior to taking on my chosen career," Randy told us. "People in Progress provided me with a sense of purpose which I've continued to develop after taking the program."

When we asked Randy what his hopes and dreams are for the future, he told us he plans to live his life to the fullest, continue to learn, and practice self-development.

We wish you the very best, Randy, as you move forward in your life.

**A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:** After interviewing Randy for this article, I was advised by staff at Our WorkPlace that he has realized his dream of purchasing his own live-aboard boat. Congratulations, Randy!

## PIP5 GRADUATION

**A** graduation ceremony for the 5th intake of the People in Progress program was held on January 12th of this year. Here are 3 of our happy grads (L to R: Haylee Pearson, Little Dave, Rob Gill) Haylee has been asked to apply for work at AIDS Vancouver Island, where she did her work placement. Little Dave has also been encouraged to apply for casual work at Our Place where he did his work placement, and Rob has been busy applying for jobs and attending interviews.





## UPCOMING EVENTS

### DROP-IN MONDAYS

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

**PEOPLE IN PROGRESS** Next intake  
end of March/beginning of April - TBC

### DIGITAL JOB HUNTERS

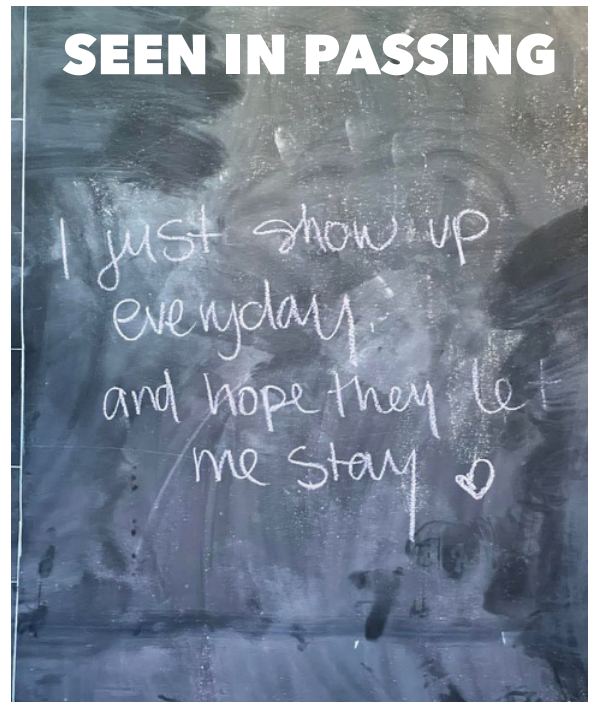
Feb 27TH to March 17th  
Monday, Wednesday, Friday  
1:00 pm-2:30 pm)

### COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Saturday, February 25, 2023 - Victoria downtown and the Westshore. More information and to sign up -

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

## SEEN IN PASSING



*A quote on the classroom blackboard from a People in Progress workshop participant!*

## SHOUT OUTS!



Our WorkPlace receives gifts and support from a variety of individuals and organizations, but a gift that arrived just before last Christmas from students at Lansdowne School really touched staff greatly. Specifically, the students dropped off 8 shoe boxes full of hygiene products and socks for clients. However, it was the notes included in the boxes that were even more special. Here's an example of just one of them. We are forever grateful for these gifts and messages from the heart.

