



# nourish community



## Together, a solution is possible

It's time for a call to action.

Barely a day goes by when we aren't asked about Pandora Avenue, what's happening there, why it's happening, and what can be done about it. Some ask from a place of frustration, others from anger, fear or distress at seeing their fellow human beings in crisis — even dying on our streets.

It doesn't matter what the motivation is — what everyone wants, without exception, is something done. As representatives of a community of social service providers, teachers and artists, we share that sentiment. Each day at work, we witness people's lives falling apart, disintegrating before our eyes, and their desperate needs unattended.

Our Place is often blamed as being the cause of what is happening on our streets, and the Conservatory of Music — western Canada's largest music school — seen as a bystander. But it is equally frustrating and heartbreaking for our organizations to witness, each day, a situation we are powerless to remedy.

We simply do not have the resources or capacity to meet the unmet housing and health needs that have driven people onto our streets.

But based on our collective and long experience, Our Place and the Conservatory believe the situation on Pandora Avenue and other streets in Victoria has a solution. It is not hopeless. We propose a four-point plan, to be executed in the following order:

- 1. Conduct an intensive outreach program with those on the street** to build a relationship and understand how they ended up there, and what it would take to get them off the street, especially understanding their health, housing and sheltering needs.
- 2. Provide and place people in a range of housing and sheltering options**, including emergency low-barrier shelters, long-term shelters, complex-care housing, transitional housing, and permanent supportive and independent housing. Remove the street and parks as being the normalized, sanctioned, and viable housing option it has become.
- 3. Support people to access a range of physical, mental illness, and addictions services and interventions**, including trauma-informed counselling, institutional mental health care, complex care, primary care, transitional treatment, detox, treatment, and recovery; and

move beyond harm reduction as being the sole response to people's addiction and health needs. In extreme situations, this care needs to be involuntary.

- 4. Support the police and judicial system to incarcerate the small number of 'bad operators'** on the street — those who are dangerous, and extremely physically and sexually violent, and those who traffic unhoused people, mainly women — and repeat offenders. This is not criminalizing homelessness or poverty but recognizing that unhoused people are disproportionately the victims of crime and deserve the same protection as housed citizens.

As the two organizations most adversely affected by what is happening on Pandora, we call on a leader from government — which has the power, resources, and capacity to drive the needed change — to come forward, bring the key players together, provide us with the necessary resources and support, and give us a deadline to make this plan happen. A leader who, while supporting us, won't accept endless reasons not to act, but help us cut through the barriers to action and get it done.

This is not an exercise in finger pointing or blame, but an attempt at a possible

solution and a call to action.

This situation is manageable. Where there is a will, there really is a way. Three years ago, we decamped roughly 500 out of our parks — which some said was not possible — by taking this approach.

Guided by our shared compassion, we can do it again. We must do it, for every citizen's sake.

**Julian Daly**  
CEO, Our Place Society

**Nathan Medd**  
CEO, Victoria Conservatory of Music



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TV SCENE INSIDE



# Moments of Hope and Belonging at Our Place

As the pandemic becomes part of our collective history, Our Place is shifting direction back to our roots and returning to our core values: unconditional love, safety,

teamwork, hope and belonging. These values have guided us for nearly 55 years, and now as programs and services can return safely to all locations, a renewed

sense of optimism is felt across our organization. Because of compassionate donations, our staff are able to bring these values to life each day when they are there

to support people struggling with poverty, mental and physical health issues, and often isolation. These are some moments of hope and belonging seen here at Our Place.

"Capital City Centre received a donation of a box of books. Because one of the staff knows the residents so well, she was going through them and recommending books to nearby residents. One resident, an older man who couldn't read himself, was recommended a book about myths, which caught his interest. The staff flipped through to find a myth that really interested him (Nordic myths) and she offered to read it aloud to him. Over the next hour or so, she intermittently read to him, while also providing support/food/etc. to residents at the front desk. At one point, the man touched her arm and had tears in his eyes. He said something along the lines of, "since my wife left me 35 years ago, I haven't felt anything, but..." and he pointed to his chest. The staff clarified that he felt something there, to which he just simply nodded."

- Courtney, Manager of Housing and Shelters

"I attended a baseball game this summer with staff and family members/residents alike. It was such a great opportunity to create joy, genuine connections and teamwork. Family members participating received encouragement, built skills and increased their personal sense of efficacy. OPS uses donor funds responsibly and intentionally. We provide basics, like food, clothing and housing, but also emotional support, resource connection and, of course, moments of joy like at the baseball game."

- Rachel, Housing Scheduling Supervisor



"My team lead and I put on a bingo game in the dining room for residents and around 10 people came. We all laughed together and it felt like family. It brought a sense of community and connectedness to the residents. They are real people who were given up on and forgotten by most of society. Understanding mental health and addiction struggles can really put into perspective how anyone can end up in the position of one of our residents and family members."

- Madeline, Housing Support Worker

"One of the people we have been supporting for many months who sleeps outside is very interested in going back to work. The problem that they face is that they can't leave their tent and other belongings alone because once they return they would come back to their home and valuables gone. We mentioned to them that OPS has storage bins that can hold their items, including their tent, so they could go to work and know they have a home to come back to after a long day. They had no idea this service existed and were amazed at the life-changing suggestion! It enables them to work and become a different part of society. It gives them hope that they will be able to depart this vicious circle."

- Kimberly, Street Outreach Team



"Speaking with a man in prison who once again experienced his addiction leading to incarceration, I slowly saw the hope seep into his eyes. I went to court with him and the judge recognized the exceptional work of our treatment centre in View Royal, the New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community. We brought him to New Roads where he was greeted with love, which quickly grew to belonging. He has a chance for change with Our Place. They belong."

- Le-Ann, Intake and Discharge Coordinator at New Roads

"We help the family members in so many different ways, even at the front desk. Photocopies, looking up something or somewhere on the internet, giving directions, recommending services in the city or the area, or even helping a family member get copies of their resume so they can seek employment. We're there for them."

- Thomas, Community Centre Front Desk

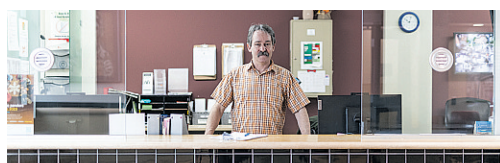


"I just listen. Because compassion is everything. We ALL matter."

- Dawneen, Housing Team Lead

"As a counsellor at New Roads, I see and hear numerous positive changes in our residents every day. For example, one of my clients who had not connected with his family in years due to his addiction was encouraged to contact them. He eventually overcame his fears and called his father, brother and sister. This long-lost connection helped him feel a sense of belonging. Our residents' lives transform tremendously. The changes that happen in a resident's life are mental, emotional and physical. We witness miracles every day in our community."

- Emma, New Roads Clinical Counsellor



*Loving care, open hearts, and non-judgmental ears are there for anyone who comes through the doors of Our Place. You are the reason why people who are struggling can find a place of hope and belonging. Your gift provides so much more than meals. It provides a chance to change a life.*



# Home Sweet Home

"This building is an absolute dream to operate," says Aarmin Purewal, Operational Manager of Housing and Shelters at Our Place, and Site Supervisor of the building in question – Our Place's brand new permanent supportive housing facility. Funded by BC Housing, in partnership with the federal government and the Capital Regional District (CRD), the building on Albina Street in Saanich was built to house residents who are still in need of a hand up, but are working towards living a healthy, stable life.

Albina is a dream for staff, like Aarmin, because the building is purpose-built supportive housing it means they can focus more on the needs of the residents rather than tending to issues with the building itself. "Covid was a blessing in a sense because so many people were forced into housing for the first time and given the opportunity to stabilize after living on the streets for so long," says Aarmin, who was once Site Supervisor at Muncey Place, the first hotel Our Place took over in 2020. "Those buildings weren't meant to be supportive housing, so it's taken us some time to turn them into the communities they are today. Now there's a very strong sense of community within our buildings. Residents at Albina are mostly coming from the former Howard Johnson location where community already existed. We hope there will be more locations like this one soon."



The new building is also a dream for its 52 residents, all of whom have experienced homelessness first-hand. Equipped with kitchenettes, a single bed, a full washroom and anything else you might find in a basic studio apartment, the rooms feature high ceilings and large windows that let in the light and foster positive energy. Albina is staffed with two Our Place housing support workers (who are there 24/7), and a site supervisor Monday to Friday, as well as peer support workers from Umbrella Society on weekdays. The

team is there to provide practical services like life-skills training, employment assistance, physical and mental-health resources, meals, and referrals to addiction treatment and recovery services. They're also there to provide kind, listening ears and non-judgmental support and care to meet people where they're at.

Albina also features a medical room, counselling rooms, a state-of-the-art kitchen where breakfast and dinner are provided each day, a common area space, and garden bed plots that are managed by the residents. "It's a really happy place," says Courtney Graham, Our Place's manager of housing and shelters. "Residents have been telling staff and volunteers how much they are enjoying their new homes, especially the gardens and outdoor space. They are also loving being able to cook for themselves and have a guest over to share a meal with."

This new building represents the final step in the continuum of care at Our Place. "At our organization, flow is everything," adds Aarmin. "We have residents here at Albina who started out receiving services at our downtown Community Centre, then they went into My Place transitional shelter and lived there for a year, then they moved into Muncey, then here. One resident from our 919 Pandora housing moved in here, has since completed treatment and is now doing WorkBC training to enter the workforce again. Another resident has just been referred to our New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community. That's very, very rewarding for us to see."

Being good neighbours and connecting with the greater community is also of utmost importance to Our Place and those we house. One neighbour, Barb, was instrumental in collecting tenant starter kits so those moving into Albina would be off to a new beginning



the second they walked through the doors. "That's the key to success in lifting people up," says Barb. "People just need a friendly face. They are our neighbours just like anyone else and they are welcome in our neighbourhood. We are wishing them every bit of success and hoping for very positive things for them."

"Our Place is now at the forefront of housing and for good reason," says Aarmin. "At the end of the day, our agenda is to support our people, be good neighbours in our communities, and do what we do best, and that's providing housing and supportive services needed by our city's most vulnerable citizens."

Along with Albina Street permanent supportive housing, Our Place operates seven more housing locations: 919 Pandora Avenue housing and night shelter, My Place, Muncey Place, Capital City Centre, New Roads and JAYMAC Place.

***If you would like to support the continuum of care at Our Place, please visit [www.ourplacesociety.com](http://www.ourplacesociety.com), call us at 250-940-5060, or return the donation slip found in this issue of the Times Colonist today!***





# HUNGRY HEARTS 2023

presented by PwC

Our Place is very grateful to our Hungry Hearts donors and sponsors. Their contributions allowed us to raise record amounts through our Best of the Region auctions, Hungry Hearts broadcast on CHEK and our recent culinary gala. With their support we can continue to serve nutritious meals to those in need in our community.

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