

Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2024

4



inside

2

CEO Message

2024 is the year where we push back against the ever-increasing despair in the world.

4

Our Family

Like a lot of teenagers, Dan smoked pot. No big deal for some, but for Dan it was the beginning of a life-long addiction.

7

Our Donors

Compassionate, caring, and colourful, Alison Acker has always been firmly committed to social justice and activism.

8

Coldest Night

Our Place Society and Pacific Centre Family Services have once again teamed up for the 2024 Coldest Night of the Year charity two and five kilometre walkathon on Feb. 24.



Hope and Belonging

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

Message from Julian

2024 is the year where we push back against the ever-increasing despair in the world, and move relentlessly forward to hope, home and healing.

Hope is one of the five core values of Our Place, and I feel that in dark times like these the need to pursue, offer and deliver hope for those we serve has never been more pressing. With care and compassion, our vision is to be more proactive rather than simply reactive.

Thanks to our successful program at New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community, we know that sustained recovery from addiction is possible, and this year we are going to double down on letting people in addiction know about treatment and recovery options, and supporting them in choosing this life changing — even lifesaving — path.

As you read this, we are in the middle of renovating our Community Centre at 919 Pandora to be not just a sanctuary for those living rough on our streets but to be a real Hub of Hope. A place where we will continue to meet basic needs and keep people alive, but also a place where we will go beyond this to create a place of welcome and belonging that gives folk hope and real reasons to live.

Once our renovations are finished everyone who walks through our front doors will be greeted by name and asked what we



can do to help. That could be a hot meal, a cup of coffee, a medical visit, hot shower, clothing, details on Vets for Pets, the 55 Plus group, the Indigenous Healing circle, help with housing applications, job applications, detox and recovery options, or one of the new programs we will be making available this year.

Our goal in 2024 is to connect with those we serve in a more determined manner and in turn to connect them with the programs and services they want and need.

In short, we don't want to accept the status quo, we want to deliver hope, home and healing, supporting folk out of a holding pattern into landing in a place which is better, happier and healthier for them.

With much gratitude,

Julian Daly
Chief Executive Officer



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!



Hope & Belonging at Our Place



WINTER CARE (Clockwise): Vets For Pets continues to be a huge program; Angel Gift volunteer team hand out wrapped gifts; CBC, CHEK and CTV broadcasters present Our Place's annual *A Christmas Carol*; Virtuous Pie helps celebrate International Volunteers Day; Camosun College Criminal Justice students drop off clothing.

Our Family

Dan's Story

“All of my passions are falling by the wayside until all of a sudden I have nothing left.”

Dan was your average teenager. His parents divorced when he was around 5, he played high school football, loved music and played in a band.

And like a lot of teenagers, he also smoked pot. No big deal for some, but for Dan it was the beginning of a life-long addiction.

“Everything snowballed from there,” he says. “My addiction started at a real young age, like I basically haven’t been sober on a regular basis since I was 14.”

A multitude of drugs were available at his Langford high school, and Dan began “experimenting with all sorts of things.”

After school, he worked in a local tree nursery before moving into the restaurant business as a dishwasher, then cook.

“At one point, I was hoping to go for my Red Seal in the culinary arts,” he says.

Unfortunately, alcohol was free flowing in the kitchens “it was almost expected” and Dan’s addiction grabbed hold with both hands.

“It just became a natural thing,” he says. “And soon the partying became more important than the work.”

Dan held on for a couple of years until the drugs took full control.

“I started with pills,” he says. “But they just

became too expensive for me and hard to source. Meanwhile, heroin was getting cheaper and cheaper.”

Once Dan became addicted to smoking heroin “that’s when life started going downhill real fast.”

Heroin, he says, “fooled me into thinking that it was helping me . . . it’s easy to believe that you need it all the time. It’s a social lubricant, you feel relaxed and charismatic — and if you have aches and pains, suddenly your body doesn’t hurt anymore.”

It’s also a hunger that is never satisfied.

“You don’t notice all the damage you’re doing to yourself and your life ‘cause you keep on thinking that you can balance it . . . as I’m pawning off all the things I own.”

To pay for his growing addiction, Dan sold off all his musical instruments: 8 guitars, 2 drum kits, a cherished upright bass, recording equipment, anything of value.

“All of my passions are falling by the wayside until all of a sudden I have nothing left.”

And when there was nothing left to pawn, the rent goes unpaid and Dan finds himself homeless and living on the streets.

“That’s really when things really started, I

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.



don't know, getting real serious," he says. To make his heroin purchases go further, Dan began injecting the drug rather than smoking it.

Drugs were easy to buy on the street and Dan quickly established a routine of picking cans and panhandling with every task having one goal: make enough to buy drugs for the day.

"It sucked, it sucked," he says. "It depresses me that I spent so long just, like once you get caught in that loop you think you'll break out, you'll get clean, this won't last forever, but time starts going by so quickly you don't realize that it was summer but now you're sleeping in the snow."

The intravenous drug use led to a number of very serious infections that landed Dan in hospital. He was at risk of losing limbs from infection, and even his life when multiple bouts of pneumonia struck.

"For a long time, I avoided the hospitals

because of the stigma, because of how drug users are treated," he says.

But something changed during one of his last hospital stays when he was visited by a social worker and made to feel safe and secure.

It was during this stay that Dan received a visit from Le-Ann Dolan, intake and discharge co-ordinator at Our Place's New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community.

"That visit changed my view on what recovery could look like," says Dan. "I always feared that I would be white-knuckling it, just pain, like boot camp or something."

Dan was all set to go to New Roads, but he was released from hospital early and ended up going straight back to the streets and back to his addiction.

A year later, Dan was back in hospital, thinking he was going to lose a hand from infection, and this time he was kept in care until his transfer to New Roads was complete.

"It blew my mind when I got here," he says. "Instead of white-knuckling it, the days are structured so naturally. It gives me the structure I need in my life without being daunting or intimidating."

He adds. "On the street, you get used to not putting in any work, but there's a lot to be said about looking after the community that you live in. You start to take pride in it."

At 34 years old, Dan has now spent 15 months in New Roads and sees a pathway to a future that he had forgotten existed.

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For more information on New Roads, please visit the website at: <https://newroads.ourplacesociety.com/>



< **NEWMAN FARM** - Awesome to know that Farmlands Trust harvested & donated a whopping 26,268 lbs of fresh produce this season. Fresh, delicious, nutritious & a new record! Our family members are green with leafy goodness :)

THAT'S A LOT OF PRODUCE

FARMLANDS TRUST

Jango

Some of the best therapists have four legs

How could you disqualify a face like this? I mean, just look at it . . . *who's a good boy?* *You are, you are, yes you are.*

Despite flunking out of service dog school (due to allergies. Man, they are tough), Jango is anything but second best when it comes to his "new job" at New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community operated by Our Place.

"He's an ambassador," says Cheryl Diebel, director of New Roads. "And he has such a strong connection to the men."

The men that Cheryl is referring to are the 40 residents who have arrived at New Roads to transform their lives from survival ruled by addiction, criminality, and the destruction both have caused.

"Unconditional love isn't something most of the men have experienced in their lives," says Cheryl. "And Jango brings that in droves."

Jango — named after the *Star Wars* character since he was born on May the Fourth — is around the residents most of the day. He attends meetings, ceremonies, and is always available for some one-on-one time when a resident is feeling in need of comfort.

"He's very playful," says Cheryl, "but also incredibly patient and calm. The men love him."

Jango arrived after Cheryl heard about the BC & Alberta Guide Dogs program that breeds, raises and professionally trains Guide Dogs for individuals who are blind/visually-impaired, Autism Service Dogs for children, and PTSD Service Dogs for Veterans and First Responders.

The rigors of training are such that dogs can fail qualification for a variety of reasons, including being too friendly, or too aggressive, or other things, like in Jango's case, allergies.

Fortunately, when a dog is released from advanced training (called non-qualifiers), the program looks for places where the dogs can thrive. And this is certainly the case with Jango.

"The men love having him around," says Cheryl. "My own dog, Farley, is getting old and wanting a quieter life, so Jango has fit right in."

Farley still shows up to New Roads about once a week as many of the longer-term residents have grown very attached to him, and Jango is happy to share the spotlight.

"They both bring such light to the space," says Cheryl. "You can see it in the men's faces when Jango or Farley pad into the room. It's pure love."



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE SNAP/CRACKLE IN OUR POP

THANK YOU TO ALL! With the Christmas season gone by, we are back to recruiting **NEW** volunteers and looking forward to increasing our volunteer capacity in both food services and clothing distribution. Please visit our online application and orientation process for safer and easier access to the Our Place volunteer experience at: <https://www.ourplacesociety.com/volunteer/>



Alison Acker, right, & inset



Our Donors

Compassionate, caring, and colourful, Alison Acker has always been firmly committed to social justice and activism.

As one of Our Place Society's most staunch supporters, she has done a lot to help Victoria's marginalized and plans to continue well into the future.

Alison had a busy career in journalism and teaching. Widowed at 34 with a son, she had limited time for protests until retirement. She then flourished as one of the founding members of the infamous Raging Grannies.

Decked out in her green bra, tutu, tights, and peony hat, she and her sisterhood focused much more attention on social issues by singing than they ever could by preaching.

She began helping those experiencing homelessness "at Reverend Al's soup

kitchen" before Our Place opened. She then helped start the Committee to End Homelessness. This group still advocates to ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are heard.

Alison and the Grannies participate in the Coldest Night of the Year. She has been a donor for more than 16 years, explaining that "Our Place is far more than a service provider; it is a community."

Her commitment to continue fighting for those in need has been extended through her will.

"Retirement was the busiest time of my life, but at 95, with 30 happy years of making trouble with the Raging Grannies and very few family left, I discovered that Our Place could take over for me and use my savings to make the world a better place when I died. I trust them to know where it will make a difference."

We warmly salute Alison for her empathy and incessant commitment to creating

a more caring and inclusive community. She inspires us to dig deep and demand better.

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Legacy gifts through your will, life insurance or retirement funds are the most effective ways to amplify your ability to help others. Along with your loved ones, please consider a gift to Our Place for the marginalized.

Your thoughtfulness will make a real difference to those experiencing poverty, homelessness, physical and

mental health issues, and addictions.

For further information on legacy giving and the associated tax savings please see Our Place Society Website, Legacy Giving. For a confidential discussion with no obligation please contact: Diana Gallivan, M.A. C.F.R.E., Philanthropy Advisor; Call: 250-940-5060, ext. 5104 or Email: legacy@ourplacesociety.com



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. To have a confidential discussion with no obligation please contact: Diana Gallivan, M.A. C.F.R.E., Philanthropy Advisor; Call: 250-940-5060, ext. 5104 or Email: legacy@ourplacesociety.com

Save The Date - Feb. 24

Warm hearts on a Cold night

Our Place Society and Pacific Centre Family Services have once again teamed up for the 2024 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
- Have a fun warm-up with great local fitness providers
- Get a free toque

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. 24 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: **Rachel Hesketh** at rachelh@ourplacesociety.com or 250-940-5060 Ext. 5108.



Our Place

Sponsor Meals



SERVE HOPE & BELONGING: You can have a direct impact on the lives of those struggling in our community when you or your

group sponsor a meal.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner sponsorships are available starting at \$600. Groups have the option to come in and serve the meal. Our

Place provides over

1,400 of meals per day and your sponsorship ensures continued support for our most vulnerable citizens. Contact rachelh@ourplacesociety.com

Out of the Cold ❄️

The need to open our Drop-In floor and Nutrition Bar adds 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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Hope and Belonging

Our Place Society
919 Pandora Avenue
Victoria, B.C. V8V 3P4
250-388-7112
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