

Transformation is possible - here's how community helps make it happen

A look at how acts of compassion in Victoria create space for safety, dignity and transformation - one person at a time

The holidays are a time when community truly comes alive. People gather at shared tables, reach out to neighbours and try — each in our own way — to make sure no one is left out of the warmth of the season. That spirit of welcome is what makes Victoria such a remarkable place to call home. Here, people look out for one another. Warmth is offered where it's needed most. When a community like this comes together, even the smallest act of compassion can transform a life. At Our Place Society, the largest provider of emergency meals in Greater Victoria, that transformation is witnessed every day. It appeared again recently when Nicole stopped by the community centre on Pandora Avenue to visit for the holidays and share her story.



A warm holiday meal brings the community together, offering comfort, safety and a reminder that no one is alone this season. Photo via Our Place Society.

copied with trauma and the realities of survival. Addiction gradually became part of her life. She moved between unsafe or unstable places across Victoria, estranged from her parents and her daughter because of the shame she carried. The holidays were the hardest — they reminded her of how far away her family felt.

There were days she went without enough food and mornings when she wrapped a sleeping bag around herself just to stay warm enough to walk to Our Place. On one of those mornings, a staff member gently brought her inside and helped her find clothing that fit — clothing that didn't leave her exposed to the cold.

She came to Our Place when she was hungry — and she was fed. She came when her clothes couldn't shield her from the weather — an outreach worker found her something

warm.

She came during the holidays, when she couldn't see her own family — and she wasn't alone. She sang carols, shared a holiday meal and on one memorable Christmas morning, received a teddy bear patched on its ear and foot.

"I thought, that's just like me," she said. "And I'm just going to keep patching myself up."

That very first meal at Our Place was a turning point for Nicole — her first step toward healing.

Today, Nicole is 12 and a half years sober. She manages PTSD and anxiety with weekly counselling. She has reconnected with her daughter — now a nurse here in Victoria — has her own apartment and shares it with her "best friend," her dog, Luna. She calls her parents every day just to chat.

"I wanted to share my story because Our Place saw me at my lowest,"

Nicole said. "They really changed my life. Helping Our Place means that you're helping people feel safe and supported. You're giving them help and comfort in a world where they don't even have a bed to sleep in."

Transformations like Nicole's don't happen by accident — they happen because people in the community choose to support others.

All month long, holiday donations will be providing meals, hygiene services, medical care, addiction recovery, street outreach, warm clothing and more. These simple supports form the foundation of every transformation — small moments of care that build safety, trust and hope.

With Our Place's first community holiday meal coming up on Dec. 17, continued community support will ensure there is enough turkey, gravy and pumpkin pie for everyone who needs it. For someone walking through the doors for the very first time, that meal may be the turning point — their first step toward a transformation like Nicole's.

Send a holiday gift at www.ourplacesociety.com/donate

The holidays highlight the compassion and commitment that define the Victoria community, at Our Place Society, that spirit is reflected in every warm meal, every safe space and every moment of care offered to those who need it most. These small acts of kindness create the foundation for healing and transformation — one person, one story and one new beginning at a time.



A hearty plate of turkey, gravy and all of the fixings — one of the simple, meaningful gestures that helps create moments of dignity and hope for those who need it most. Photo via Our Place Society.

Nicole became homeless as a teenager, became pregnant soon after and spent years trying to raise a newborn while