



FALL NEWSLETTER 2026

What's inside

Our Stories



2

CEO Message:

We are so much more than Pandora Avenue

4

Our Family

Sean's first steps home

6

Our Community

What keeps our Community Centre Supervisor coming back every day

7

Our Supporters

Urban Systems Foundation

8

Ways to Get Involved

Let Our Youth Lead the Way



Hope and Belonging

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



Message from Julian

When people think of Our Place, they often think of Pandora Avenue.

I understand why. Our Community Centre at 919 Pandora sits in the heart of one of the most visible and challenging areas of our city. The suffering on the street is impossible to ignore—and we shouldn't ignore it. Addiction, homelessness, mental illness and poverty are real, and they affect not only the people experiencing them, but our entire community.

But I also invite you to look through our doors, and beyond them. You'll see family members finding welcome and connection at the Community Centre—and you'll see the many ways we're walking alongside people toward housing, recovery and stability across our region.

Because **Our Place is so much more than Pandora.**

Across more than 10 locations, almost 300 extraordinary staff are helping people move forward every single day.

Each night, we shelter and house close to 400 people in emergency shelters,



transitional housing and supportive housing. We operate therapeutic recovery communities for men and women, where people are rebuilding lives after years—sometimes decades—of addiction and homelessness. We support people into second-stage sober housing, reconnect them with family, help them find employment and create opportunities through our social enterprise.

And at 919 Pandora we provide meals, showers, clothing, connection and a place of belonging. Increasingly, we see the Community Centre not as a destination, but as a **starting point and a new beginning.**

It's the first step on our **Pathway of Support.**

Someone may first come through our doors because they are hungry. Over time, a relationship develops. Trust grows. That person may move into shelter, then housing. They may begin addressing their substance use, enter treatment, move into sober housing, reconnect with family, find employment and ultimately live independently.

Not everyone will follow that same path. Not everyone is ready today. But everyone deserves the opportunity.

This is also why we are increasingly talking about creating a **recovery ecosystem**—a continuum in which people aren't simply helped to survive, but are given genuine opportunities to recover, rebuild and thrive.

We cannot solve every problem on Pandora Avenue. We cannot control the toxic drug supply, the housing crisis, untreated mental illness or everything that happens on the streets around us. That doesn't mean we don't care deeply about those things. We do.

But this year, particularly, I want us to focus our energy on the things **we can change.**

We can help someone come inside tonight.

We can help someone find a home.

We can walk alongside someone into recovery.

We can help someone rebuild a relationship with their children.

We can offer someone a job, a community and a reason to believe in themselves again.

And we can ensure that, at every stage, people encounter the values at the heart of Our Place: **Hope, Belonging, Safety, Unconditional Love and Teamwork.**

So when you think of Our Place, I hope you will think of Pandora—but not only Pandora.

Think of hundreds of people sleeping safely tonight. Think of someone graduating from treatment. Think of a family reunited. Think of someone receiving their first paycheck in years.

Think of people moving from **surviving to thriving.**

Because that, ultimately, is what Our Place is about.

With gratitude,

Julian Daly
CEO

Julian



Embrace Arts and Movement at the Community Centre



Community Centre Rooftop Garden growing produce for the Kitchen

Rennie & Associates at the Victoria Realtor Charity Softball Classic



Self Massage Therapy at 55+ Club



Hope & Belonging at Our Place

Save On Foods donates a monthly birthday cake to the 55+ Club



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!

Our Family

"I forgot who I was"

Sean's first steps home

Two years ago, Sean never imagined he would spend a night in a shelter. At 60, he had built a full life. He worked for years as a contractor. He went back to school to earn a diploma in addiction counselling, and he spent years as program manager of a second-stage recovery house in Vancouver, teaching men the practical skills they'd need to live on their own: cooking, cleaning, even how to run a washing machine.



"I had the pleasure of helping many men recover," he says.

He moved to Victoria to be close to his mother and to help her as she ages. When things didn't work out as he had planned, he rented a room in an apartment in the Tillicum area. "I paid the rent. I did everything," he says. Then, with no notice, he was told to leave.

Renting a room left him with few protections, and suddenly he had nowhere to go. "I couldn't believe how stunned I was," Sean says. "So I just got on a bus and came here."

Walking through the door

Sean knew almost nothing about Our Place. Once, walking past an event outside 919 Pandora, he'd stopped to ask for a glass of water. That was all.

Walking in was terrifying. It wasn't the people on the street that frightened him. It was the voice in his own head telling him he had failed. The night staff were among the first people he met, and that first night, their kindness was all he had to hold on to.

"Our Place saved my life," he says. "It's really that simple for me."

The hardest moment came the next morning, when shelter guests head outside at 7 a.m. so the building can be cleaned and made ready for the day. After a lifetime of heading off to work at that hour, Sean found himself standing on the sidewalk with nowhere to go. "That's where it struck me," he says. "How did I get here?"

Finding his place

Later that morning, Sean came back inside and settled in for breakfast. That's where he met Kristen Sanborn, Our Place's social inclusion support worker for seniors, who introduced him to the 55-Plus Club. "Her kindness, her enthusiasm, it makes a difference," he says.

At first, he admits, he wasn't sure he belonged in a seniors' program. "I didn't connect with my own age," he laughs. It was on his second visit that it clicked. "I thought, wait a minute, Sean, are you in denial? You ARE actually a senior. I'm okay here."

He's come to love the 11 o'clock circle, where members gather for coffee, treats and conversation. "We cheer, we talk. It's very freestyle and it moves very quickly," he says. "My brain moves very quickly, so it's quite entertaining for me." He enjoys never knowing who'll be at the table. "Charming people," he says. "You get different people all the time. It's exciting, and I love it."

Most of all, it's the welcome. From his first days, members and staff made it clear they were glad he was there. "We all enjoy you being here," Kristen told him. Some might call that kind of warmth corny, but not Sean. "It's not corny," he says. Being accepted just as he is, he says, is helping him get back to his true self.



His first steps on the pathway

As a man who had always worked, Sean found the world of housing support completely unfamiliar. "I didn't know about subsidies," he says. "It was all foreign to me."

Our Place's housing staff took the time to sit with him, answer every question and walk alongside him through each step, from applications and paperwork to supports he never knew existed.

That work has paid off quickly. Sean is now moving into My Place, one of Our Place's supportive housing locations, where he'll be welcomed into another part of the Our Place family. Residents have a room that's truly their own, along with meals and on-site support staff as they work toward long-term housing. There's no signing up each night and no changing rooms. It's their place, for as long as they need it.

For Sean, it's a place to feel settled and safe, and to catch his breath. "It allows me breathing room," he says. "Every day, every hour, I'm returning to okay. I forgot who I was."

He's clear that this is a beginning, not an ending. "It's all just rebuilding for me," he says. "That's what I'm doing."

Twenty-six days ago, Sean had nowhere to go. At Our Place, he found safety in our shelter, community in the 55-Plus Club and support to find a home. Now he is preparing to move into My Place. His story shows what can happen when someone has people alongside them at every step.

Twenty-six nights on a mat in a community centre may not sound like much to be thankful for. But Sean is grateful for every one of them. "It's been hard, but eye-opening," he says. "But necessary." That time gave him room to learn and grow, and now he's ready for his move to My Place, a stable place of his own.

He doesn't like to imagine where he'd be without the emergency shelter at Our Place. "If it weren't for here..." he says, trailing off. Every night, he and 55 others find safety, warmth and kindness at 919 Pandora. "What would our city be without these critical safety nets?"

Giving back

Sean says he admires how Our Place staff are "right in it" with the people they serve, and he already knows how he'd like to repay the kindness he's received. "It's a debt I can never repay, but I'll try," he says. "I'd like to come back as a volunteer in the future."

With his background in addiction counselling and years spent helping others rebuild their lives, he has a lot to offer. For now, he's focused on taking the next step, with a community behind him.



BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY BUILDERS PROGRAM TODAY

You can make a big impact all year long and ensure there is help available in our community every day. As a monthly donor, we'll send you just one consolidated receipt for your annual donation in time for filing your tax return each year. Call our philanthropy team at 250-940-5060 or choose 'monthly' when donating online at www.ourplacesociety.com/donate

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

It's easy to apply. We now have a user-friendly online application that opens and pauses depending on our recruitment needs as well as an orientation process that enhances your Our Place volunteer experience. Please visit www.ourplacesociety.com/volunteer to get started.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS!

Our Community

Ask Jessica, the Site Supervisor of our Community Centre, what keeps her coming back to work, and she doesn't hesitate: the Family Members.

"It is so cool to see transitions," she says. "People from when they first step in the door, to how we're able to support them. The difference a shower makes, the difference a meal makes, and just helping people to move forward."



What makes the Community Centre unusual, Jessica says, is who comes through the door. "We don't just serve one demographic. We have unhoused people, seniors, we have housed people who have previously had services, some people who have never had services, all coming together and finding community here."

Ensuring that people feel welcome is a big part of what Jessica and her team do. They check in with Family Members, especially the quiet ones, "making sure they feel seen, that they feel heard." Over the years, Our Place has also learned to adapt our programs and activities to meet the changing needs and interests of people who walk through our doors.

The Family Members themselves also play a big role in creating a welcoming environment in the Community Centre. Jessica gives the example of Paul, who

can often be found seated at the bottom of the staircase, and knows everybody's name. "He makes sure everybody feels welcome. Just that feeling of community that you get here."

The programming offered in the centre also plays a vital role. Someone can arrive with no idea where they will sleep that night, and then: "Ooh, karaoke." These activities can provide a small burst of joy in the middle of an otherwise hard day. The team are always trying to "do something each day that can support the mental wellness of the people we're serving."

Jessica encourages the people of Victoria to come and see the Community Centre for themselves: "I wish people knew that it's not scary inside." Visitors on tours tell her the same thing time and again: I wasn't expecting it to be clean; I wasn't expecting it to be calm. "Come on in," she says. "Come see it for yourself."



Our Donors

Some community partners write a cheque. Some volunteer their time. Some find creative ways to brighten someone's day.

Urban Systems Foundation somehow manages to do all three — and then keeps going.

Their mission is centred around "spirit in service": showing up for one another and helping create healthy, thriving communities. And their Victoria team brings that mission to life in such a genuine way.

Over the years, Urban Systems Foundation has supported Our Place in just about every way imaginable.

They sponsor meals throughout the year — and then their team comes in to help serve them.

They host summer BBQs and invite staff from across Canada to join in, giving their colleagues a chance to roll up their sleeves, meet our family members and see firsthand what community support looks like.

When the weather turns hot or cold,



they pack emergency weather kits filled with love and thoughtful, practical supplies for people living outside.

And because apparently that still isn't enough, they have also built, planted and delivered beautiful planters to our housing locations — bringing colour, care and a little extra joy to our residents.

Really, what don't they do?

What we love most about Urban Systems Foundation is that they don't simply support the community from the sidelines. They show up. They get involved. They ask what is needed — and then they find a way to help.

To the wonderful Urban Systems Foundation team: thank you for your generosity, your creativity and your willingness to jump in wherever you are needed.

Our community is brighter because you are part of it.

LEGACY OF LOVE OUR PLACE DONORS ARE COMPASSIONATE, KIND, AND LOYAL. Living these values like you do is what makes our work possible. You can extend these values beyond your life and create a Legacy of Love for the future with a gift in your will. For more information, write to Janice at janicek@ourplacesociety.com

A PLANNED GIFT
CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN



Get Involved

Let Our Youth Lead the Way

What if sponsoring a meal could nourish our family members — and help shape the next generation of compassionate Victorians?

Through our Youth Sponsored Meals program, we invite young people into the Community Centre to learn more about the community they live in, meet our family members, and experience what it means to show up for someone else.

These evenings are about much more than serving food. For our family members, seeing young people walk through the doors to serve a meal sends a powerful message: you matter, you are part of this community, and you have not been forgotten.

For the youth, it is an opportunity to see their city through a different lens, build empathy and understanding, and discover that they can play a meaningful role in making their community stronger.

The enthusiasm is already there. We have young people who are eager to volunteer, serve and get involved. What many of them do not have is the financial ability to sponsor the meal themselves.

That's where you can help.

By sponsoring a Youth Meal, you provide the meal while giving a group of young people the opportunity to come to Our Place and serve it.

Your gift does double duty: it provides a warm meal today while helping nurture the helpers, volunteers and compassionate community leaders of tomorrow.

Interested in sponsoring a meal for our youth to serve? Please contact Sharra at sharrah@ourplacesociety.com.

Or, do you have a young person in your life, age 18 or older, who would love the opportunity to get involved, meet our community and serve alongside us? We'd love to hear from them too!

MEALS OPEN DOORS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



This holiday season, bring warmth, joy, and a little extra cheer to people in need through Our Place's Sponsored Meals Program. It's a meaningful volunteer experience that brings our community together over a delicious meal.

With a donation starting at \$600, you can turn a regular mealtime into something special and join our team in serving meals directly to people experiencing homelessness and poverty.

Help transform a simple oatmeal breakfast into a hearty holiday meal of bacon and eggs! Roll up your sleeves, serve alongside our team, and experience firsthand the smiles and connections your generosity can create.

Can't make it downtown to volunteer? You can still spread holiday cheer by donating to our Matching Meals Fund, helping make special meals and volunteer opportunities possible for others.

Email Sharra at sharrah@ourplacesociety.com or call 250-940-5060 ext. 5108 to learn more and sponsor a meal today!



Hope and Belonging

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