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FALL NEWSLETTER 2015



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We thank Tech Web Direct for donating
resources to print this colour newsletter

Executive Director's Message

Every one of us is brought into this world with a unique set of gifts, but talent, imagination and self-confidence are constructs that need to be nurtured in order to blossom.

When that care isn't there, when it becomes lost amidst addiction, abuse, trauma and/or mental illness, it withers on the vine. It doesn't die, though, it's merely hibernating, waiting for the right moment to rise up and flourish.

At Our Place, we create opportunities that help our family members rediscover their gifts. Too often people will pass someone on the street who has found their life turned upside down and they will dismiss them as being lazy or unworthy.

Our Place offers unconditional love in a non-judgmental way. Our duty is to help empower each individual who comes through our doors, instilling inspiration to reignite an ember of hope.

And when that ember does begin to glow again, the results are incredible.

On National Aboriginal Day, I watched with delight as First Nations family members shook off their worries for a minute or two and celebrated their identity with pride. I witnessed many of them share their stories in song and dance.

At the Moss Street Paint-In, seven members of the Our Place family displayed their artistic



talents for all of Victoria to see — and people were amazed. Meanwhile, the Downtown Story Collective, which meets weekly here, recently published a book of its members' heartfelt poetry and prose.

Often I find through helping others discover their gifts, we uncover our own, and I invite you to volunteer with us and see what's hidden within you. Our Place continues to expand programs and services that tap into the healing energy of the arts from choir, music, dance, art, writing and more.

With the right encouragement and financial support we can strengthen the vine and nurture spectacular growth.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Don Evans'.

Don Evans
Executive Director



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 increased programs and services offered are only possible with the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters like you. Thank you!



Our Events

Aboriginal Day

We celebrated **National Aboriginal Day** in style with traditional First Nations food, music and dance. Our Place Elder Fred Roland (pictured above) got the crowd into the spirit with a rousing demonstration of drumming and singing, while the Esquimalt Dancers & Drummers took over our courtyard for an incredible performance. Lunch was fresh sockeye salmon from Finest At Sea. One quarter of our family members identify as Aboriginal and appreciated having their unique culture celebrated.



Moss Street Paint-In

Seven Our Place artists participated in this year's **TD Art Gallery Paint-In** on Moss Street thanks to an invitation from Fairfield United Church. The church generously provided the space, while the artists delivered the creative inspiration. One of the artists, Glenn Frazer, has lived at Our Place for three years, honing skills instilled at the Kootenay School of the Arts. A failed marriage, a disability and drug addiction put him on the streets.

"I managed to get back into my art work and it's been a very healing thing," he told the Times Colonist. "I'm really doing well. Most of my time is spent doing my art at Our Place. It keeps me out of addiction."

Food Truck Gala

When local businessman Scott Burley decided to do something special for Our Place, the idea of a **Food Truck Gala** was a natural. "I want everyone to be treated with kindness and



respect, regardless of their income or station in life," says Burley who owns and operates **2 Burley Men** moving company. "All the local food vendors I approached were eager to get onboard." The fresh-made food included burritos from Taco Justice, pulled pork sandwiches from Judy's Snack Shack, and giant slices of pizza from Ali Baba Pizza. For dessert, Burley secured over 1,000 gourmet ice-cream sandwiches from Cold Comfort.

< **PRIDE PARADE:** It was another great event as Victoria celebrated Pride with a colourful parade downtown, followed by a full day of festivities. Our Place participated by walking in the parade to show Hope & Belonging for everyone, while a great group of volunteers spent the day selling water and in-house designed T-shirts to raise money and awareness of all that Our Place offers.

Our Family

Mabel's Story

At the age of 60, Mabel accomplished one of her lifelong goals. She graduated high school.

"I didn't really do great in school when I was young," she says. "It was always a struggle, and I never really understood why until later in life when my learning disability was diagnosed."

But despite that obstacle, Mabel never gave up on her dream. Math was her biggest challenge, but every time she failed the final exam, she would brush herself off and try again.

"I never gave up," she says. "And when the school asked me to talk to the younger students, I encouraged them to never give up either."

That strength of tenacity has served Mabel well as she works hard every day to remain positive and make her dreams come true.

Born in Manning, Alberta, Mabel's family moved to Vancouver Island at a young age upon a doctor's recommendation that it would help with her childhood asthma.

But while the asthma disappeared, Mabel endured two sexual assaults — one when she was 8, the other at 13 — that sent her life on a spiral into addiction.

That addiction included alcohol, drugs, sex and gambling, the weight of which led her into unhealthy relationships and moments of utter despair.

"I remember sleeping in a car in -40°C weather covered in old clothes for warmth. I would sneak into a motel to get a shower and scrounge for leftover crackers."

Like most women who find themselves alone and vulnerable on the street, Mabel attached herself to the wrong men.

"When I left the last one," she says about Husband No. 3. "I knew something inside me had to change, something big."

As Mabel talks about her past, her soulful eyes reflect the fortitude she needed to survive.

"It took a long time to get over that emotional damage," she says. "But I heard the word of God telling me 'You never have to do that again.'"

A small smile breaks across her lips as she shares that she has now been clean and sober for 24 years.

Mabel arrived at Our Place at the end of January. She was homeless and needed someplace to catch her breath and get back on her feet.

Here, she found the housing support workers to be friendly and helpful, "but what I really like is if they don't have the answer, they'll find it. They realize that we



BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR



JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF LOVE PROGRAM TODAY

JOIN THE OVER 700 MEMBERS of our Circle of Love program today! Our Place is grateful to our monthly Circle of Love donors who spread out annual donations over 12 months, which helps us plan and budget more effectively, and reduces mailing and environmental costs. Monthly donors receive a single consolidated charitable tax receipt annually. Monthly giving via credit card or direct debit from your bank account is simple to set up — please give us a call at 250-413-3161 to find out more.



all need help at some point in our lives, regardless of our situation."

Living on the Recovery Floor, Mabel has become a mentor and role model for those women who are still struggling day to day. She sees her role today as one of support and guidance, to let other women know how they can walk out of an abusive relationship and find the help they need.

"I try to give people hope," she says. "I didn't have one week of sobriety without hope."

Her housing support worker, Darren Schweitz, agrees.

"Right from the get-go, Mabel was ready and eager to put in the work," he says. "She doesn't let roadblocks stymie her efforts or get her down."

"She's also a really good influence on the floor," he adds. "Really focused and motivated."

The Recovery Floor is a fairly new initiative by Our Place that affords its residents who are active in their recovery the opportunity to support each other in their sobriety. Regular meetings and ongoing counselling give the residents a positive path to follow as they make plans for their future.

"One day I see myself running a Bed and Breakfast and travelling the world to spread the word of God and tell my story," says Mabel.

In the meantime, Mabel's next step is to move into less supported housing where she's excited about the possibility of a kitchenette and, her eyes light up with glee as she gushes, "a bathtub."

And, despite her past trouble with men, Mabel is looking forward to meeting Husband No. 4.

"But this time," she says, "it will be different. I have grown as a person, and I have knowledge between my ears. I'm not struggling anymore. I'm thriving."



< **THE BIKE MAINTENANCE WORKSHOP** program has proven very popular this summer. One day a month in the courtyard, family members are lining up to get their bikes and carts fixed and maintained by the great people of Pedaler Cycle Tours, Velofix and the Fairfield Bicycle Shop.

BIKE REPAIR & MAINTENANCE

NEW AT OUR PLACE!

Our Programs

Food Services,
Special Meals,
Sponsor-a-Breakfast



There are many roads that lead to Our Place, whether you arrive as a volunteer, staff member or someone in need.

Quite often, those paths are multi-forked and complex, but the end result is always that you've found a place of healing, hope and belonging. When David Pickard found himself at the door of Our Place's predecessor, The Upper Room, he was a very different person from the friendly face that greets every volunteer and business owner who arrives at Our Place to sponsor a breakfast or host a special meal.

Standing on the precipice of the Johnson Street bridge, David was ready to jump. Despair had brought him to the brink.

With a heart that's likely two sizes too big, David had been a housing manager for low-income rentals in Vancouver during the terror reign of serial killer Robert Pickton. Before Pickton was arrested, David witnessed a vulnerable female tenant getting into his vehicle. She was one of six women he knew who disappeared. A short

time later, David recognized the driver's photo when Pickton's arrest hit the media.

"I suffered from severe depression after that," David confesses. "I felt immense guilt that I wasn't able to protect them."

After discovering the body of a teenage girl behind a dumpster in one of the buildings where he worked, David abandoned everything and walked away. That walk led him to Vancouver Island and the Johnson Street bridge.

Fortunately, a passerby thought his actions looked suspicious and called the police. Shortly after, he arrived at the Upper Room.

"The staff there let me do nothing for three or four months," says David. "I was very fragile, but they simply talked and offered support. I hadn't had that before."

Always someone who liked to stay busy, David began volunteering in the kitchen. After six months, he landed a job as a sous chef in an Oak Bay restaurant. And four years later, when Our Place opened its doors for the first time, David returned as full-time staff.

"Every day is a challenge, and I thrive on it," he says with his trademark smile. "I'm surrounded by good friends, get invaluable support, and have been in a loving relationship for nine years."

With over 579,000 meals served last year, David, who is about to celebrate a milestone birthday, is never idle.

"I'll go until I can't," he says with a hearty laugh. "Life is good today."

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE
THE CURDS IN OUR WHEY

BECOME PART OF A DYNAMIC TEAM of compassionate people assisting Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. Volunteer orientation sessions happen every month and are the best way to find out more about who we are, what we do and how you can get involved! For more information, visit our website or call Julia, our Manager of Volunteers, at 250-388-7112 Ext. 243.



Our Donors

"Humanitarianism should simply be a part of the price of doing business," says Rumble co-founder Paul Underhill.

Paul's first connection with Our Place came when he was studying at university. He volunteered to serve at one of our signature Thanksgiving meals, and the experience had a profound impact on the way he wanted to conduct business.

Born with cystic fibrosis, Paul underwent a double lung transplant in 2011. While recovering, Paul concocted a nutrient-rich shake packed with protein and all-natural ingredients. The drink was so successful in rebuilding his health that Paul, along with several partners, decided to market it under the name of Rumble.

The connection with Our Place was reignited when one of our volunteers went looking for a healthy meal replacement for some people who had difficulty chewing.

After donating several cases of Rumble to our kitchen, Paul decided he wanted to do even more, and more importantly he wanted other businesses to do more as well.

That's where One Percent for Hunger was born, whose purpose is to build and support an alliance of businesses financially committed to the goal of eliminating hunger in their communities. Companies who sign on to One Percent for Hunger donate 1% of their sales to member charities addressing hunger and food security issues.

"Hunger is a massive problem and businesses can lead the way in addressing the issue," says Paul. "The more businesses who sign on to One Percent for Hunger, the stronger the alliance and the greater its ability to end hunger."



< HOMELESS HERO: When a homeless man found over \$2,000 in the street, his decision to turn it over to the police inspired hundreds of people to donate a reward for his good deed. But in an additional twist, the man, who wishes to remain anonymous, asked to donate the reward to Our Place. Inspired by this generosity, local philanthropist Andrew Beckerman matched the donation to Our Place with a cheque for \$5,000.



Things We Need

**MENS CLOTHING
SOCKS & UNDERWEAR
BOOTS & SHOES
GLOVES & SCARVES
TOQUES & HATS
WARM JACKETS
BLANKETS & TENTS
SLEEPING BAGS
DRY GOODS
TOILETRIES**

Winter is coming! Our fellow citizens in need will feel the cold and damp on the streets of Greater Victoria. Empty your closets and bring your warm coats and jackets, blankets and sleeping bags to Our Place. Donations of new underwear and socks are always greatly appreciated.

**Contact Tracy at
250-388-7112 ext. 259.**

Creative Ways to Give



CREATING TRANQUILITY: Bob Sellmer works part-time in our kitchen as a dishwasher, but when we discovered what a talented artist he is, we had to put those skills to use. Bob has been busy transforming the curved, rear wall of our lower level Rec Room into a tranquil Island rain forest. Before adding lush greens, Bob creates detail with light and shadow.

Sponsor-a-Breakfast

This popular morale-boosting and team-building opportunity invites your group to sponsor and serve a warm, nutritious morning meal to kick-start the day for 300 family members. Our talented kitchen staff prepares a nutritious, cooked breakfast. A \$500 fee covers the cost of the food, and we encourage an extra donation to help fund support for people accessing our services.



For more information, visit our website or contact Tracy at 250-388-7112 ext. 259

Leave A Legacy

Once you have provided for loved ones in your will, perhaps you would consider including a charitable bequest to Our Place Society. Research shows that more than 1.5 million Canadians alive today have made charitable bequests and another 1 million are considering it. A gift in your will is a cost-effective way to ensure that the people and charitable causes most important to you are remembered. At Our Place, legacy gifts provide vital, stable support for our work, and will play a key role in the coming years as we continue to deepen our engagement with, and service to, the community. **For more information, please contact Laura Walsh or Lori Angelini at 250-413-3161**

Our Place Recent Stats

May - August 2015

Meals Served

198,878



Volunteer Hours

12,493



Showers in Hygiene

4,032



One-on-One Sessions

519



Crisis Interventions

362



Your Help is needed this Winter

Moving into fall and winter, the need to open our Drop-In floor and Nutrition Bar into the evening will add over \$160,000 to our annual budget. To make this possible, we desperately 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 call:

250-413-3161

 **ourplace**
Hope and Belonging

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