

Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2015

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Hope and Belonging

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



Executive Director's Message

Faces of Love. It was a title we selected for a recent art exhibition by an Our Place supporter, but it also sums up the people whom we serve.

You may have read or heard on the news about the substantial increase in need we faced after extending our hours until 9 p.m., seven days per week. Our meal service saw the largest impact as we served over 58,000 meals per month once the weather turned cold and wet. But it's the faces behind those headlines that truly resonated with me.

When our evening meal moved from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m., I took the opportunity to sit down with many of the new faces we were seeing to find out what had brought them to Our Place. And what I learned shines a bright light on the face of poverty in our region.

That small shift in time brought more working men and women through our doors. These are people with jobs, but who simply can't make ends meet. Their wages are low, their rents are high, and for those with children, those needs come first.

Other new faces include numerous young people who are exiting the foster care system, but without any place to go. A troubling 50-per-cent of youth who leave foster care end up homeless.

I also visited with more seniors on fixed incomes, men in their 50's and 60's who are victims of downsizing and struggling to find work, and too many people battling mental health and addiction issues and not



knowing where to turn.

These are just a few of the reasons why we refer to those we serve as Family. Thanks to all our community supporters — we are here for them when they need it most. We are here to provide support, assist in navigating the system, provide meals and showers, and even to provide a break from their troubles to include more social activities, such as bingo, board games, knitting and movie nights.

It is this unconditional love that offers the best opportunity for hope and transformation, and we couldn't do it without you.

Thank You,

Don Evans
Executive Director



THANK 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 over the past year would not have been possible without the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters. Thank you!



Our Recent Events

Royal Visit

It's not every day that a member of the Royal Family visits Our Place, so you can imagine how thrilled our Family members were to welcome Her Royal Highness Sophie, The Countess of Wessex.

Along with the Lieutenant Governor, Sophie toured our facility and stopped to chat with everyone. Friendly and engaging, Sophie was very impressed with all the programs and services offered here.

Sophie helped serve lunch, posed for numerous selfies, and met several of the Family members for one-on-one chats to better understand how Our Place is improving the lives of Victoria's impoverished.

Christmas Carol

A wonderful time was had by all at Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* presented by CBC and Our Place. The Alix Golden Hall was filled with singing and festive joy as Dickens' masterpiece was read by CBC personalities Gregor Craigie, Khalil Akhtar, Shelagh Rogers, Kelly Nakatsuka, Jo-Ann Roberts, Bob McDonald and Arthur Black.

Mayoral Debate

Our Place hosted a special mayoral candidates debate prior to the civic election on the issues surrounding homelessness and affordable housing in Victoria.

The invited candidates – Stephen Andrew, Ida Chong, Dean Fortin and Lisa Helps – were questioned on how they would deal with these issues if elected. The debate was moderated by Khalil Akhtar, co-host of CBC Radio's *On the Island*. A video of the event can be found on our website at: ourplacesociety.com/mediapublications/videos

Faces of Love

In 2007, artist Elfrida Schragen painted a series of portraits that helped fund the opening of Our Place. So when she was approached about an artist-in-residency program at a local resort, she immediately knew what – and who – she wanted to paint.



"It's been seven years," says Schragen, "and I enjoyed it so much the first time that I was itching to do it again."

Schragen spent several weeks visiting with Family members, taking photos and getting to know each individual's story before creating 12 new portraits. Six portraits have been sold for \$1,000 each and donated back to Our Place. Six others are still available.



ANGEL GIFTS: Our multi-faith chapel was bulging with Christmas gifts for Family members this year. Through the generosity of local churches, schools, community groups, government offices, businesses and individuals, Our Place distributed over 750 presents to people who otherwise would have had nothing. The presents were provided by the generosity of the community through the Angel Gifts program.

Our Family

Mark's Story

“ When you're homeless, you get this feeling of despair – you just feel hopeless. ”

When he was only seven years old, Mark suffered the first of two serious head injuries that forever changed his life.

While riding his bike to school in St. Catharines, Ontario, Mark was struck by a car and suffered a devastating head injury. The driver stopped, helped him up and told him that he was okay.

Unfortunately, he wasn't.

The next several years are a blank as Mark lost the ability to form memories or remember any details.

“It's all a blank,” he says. “All I know is that I was doing poorly at school – and always getting into trouble.”

“Nobody really knew what was wrong because I didn't speak about the accident. I didn't want to get in trouble for crashing my bike, and the driver was gone.”

When his family moved to Tsawwassen in 1973, Mark was placed in a remedial class where he received one-on-one teacher support.

“My memory improved and I began to excel, getting As and Bs,” he says.

And because he was doing so well, it was decided that Mark should be returned to regular school.

Unfortunately, without the support, his grades plummeted again.

“School wasn't doing it for me, so I started dealing dope to all my classmates.”

Mark dropped out of school at 17 to work in a machine shop – he also became more heavily involved in the drug trade.

“I slid into heavy drug and alcohol use, and started moving from job to job. I had a chip on my shoulder and had trouble working for a boss.”

While working on cars in his back yard, Mark had his first taste of crack cocaine.

“It hooked me from the first puff,” says Mark. “I instantly needed more.”

Mark quit working on cars and started selling drugs full-time. The parties, money and lifestyle were addictive until he was attacked and robbed – and suffered his second head injury.

The beating was so severe that Mark

LEGACY OF LOVE

A PLANNED GIFT CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE that Our Place's Legacy of Love planned giving program has had a successful year and we are blessed to have so many generous donors thinking of us in their future plans. Leaving a gift in your will with Our Place will ensure that those experiencing poverty will always have a welcoming and supportive environment with vital services and programs at our downtown location; you are truly helping to transform lives. If you are interested in learning more about leaving a Legacy of Love with Our Place please call us at 250-388-7112 or email legacy@ourplacesociety.



was left crippled and had to learn how to walk again — a skill he still has trouble with even to this day.

"I get dizzy sometimes," he says, "and it's easy for me to lose my footing."

Finally realizing the drug trade was going to kill him, Mark and his girlfriend, Jill, packed up their belongings in 2005 and moved to Victoria for a clean start.

"We couch surfed for a couple months," he says, "but when you're homeless, you get this feeling of despair — you just feel hopeless. You don't want to get up in the morning."

Finally, Jill got a bed in a local shelter and while staying there, she heard about Open Door, one of the founding organizations of Our Place.

"At first, we went there for meals, but the outreach workers — who still work at Our Place today — helped me get my disability benefits, and then they got us housed. After we were housed, our lives started to get better."

Now that he was housed, Mark wanted to start making money again — but not in the drug trade.

"I don't need that looking-over-your-shoulder lifestyle anymore," he says with a grin.

The staff at Our Place helped him secure a contract with the City of Victoria to clean graffiti off the walls of downtown buildings.

"I really enjoy doing that," he says.

Along with volunteering at Our Place, Mark is also part of the S.O.L.I.D. outreach team who offer support to their peers, provide information about safer drug use and resources in town, collect used syringes, and distribute harm reduction supplies.

"We do our outreach seven days a week, 365 days of the year," says Mark proudly.

Called "Rig Diggers" in reference to the used needles they collect off the street, Mark says he can fill four 5-gallon buckets of needles in a month.

Because of the bumps in the road that Mark has overcome, he has a unique ability to connect with people on the street and offer them the same level of compassion that he found at Our Place.

THERE ARE NEW VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES in the evening and on weekends as Our Place extends its hours this winter. Become part of a dynamic team of compassionate people assisting Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. To find out when the next volunteer orientation session is being held, call our **Manager of Volunteers** at 250-388-7112 Ext. 243 or email volunteer@ourplacesociety.com.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF WHAT WE DO

Our Programs

Aboriginal Housing Support



Imagine being homeless and every time you see a vacancy for an apartment, the landlord takes one look and says, "We're full."

But this isn't the Christmas story, it's real life for so many Family members — especially the over 30-per-cent of the Our Place community who identify as Aboriginal.

To help our Aboriginal Family members get the hand-up they deserve, Our Place — with the assistance of a grant from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy — has recently hired two Aboriginal Housing Support workers.

Meet **Eddie Mack** and **Derek Book** (shown above) who bring a wealth of experience in connecting people with the resources they need to better manage their lives.

"We see a lot of family disruption," says Derek about the Family members he works with. "Once they leave the reserve, all of their support network is gone."

For Derek and Eddie, that means working one-on-one with couples, families and individuals to create a case plan from the ground up.

"Some of the people we work with haven't seen their kids in a couple of months, they need I.D., want to get into treatment, or need help navigating the system," says Derek.

"It can beat you down," he adds. "When you face so many struggles, can't find work, and a landlord won't give you the time of day, it's tough."

Derek and Eddie know it takes a methodical approach — and a network of agencies — to get the job done, but so far, they're seeing great success.

"We've housed over 20 Aboriginal people," Derek says with a smile. "And that's just in the last couple of months."

Both Eddie and Derek have been impressed with the "atmosphere of welcoming" that they've seen at Our Place, and they invite everyone to seek them out in the Drop-In.

NEW PROGRAMS

BINGO AND KNITTING PROVE TO BE A HIT WITH THE FAMILY

SOME OF THE MANY NEW PROGRAMS introduced recently include: First Nations Morning Circle, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, second hairdressing shift on Sundays, second knitting class on Tuesdays, Reiki energy healing and Taoist Tai Chi on Fridays; paramedic once a week to administer advanced First Aid, Bingo on Thursday nights and Board Games on Friday nights, Saturday movie nights, First Nations beading and weaving, and much more.



Our Donors

Paul and Barbara Best have been giving monthly since Our Place opened

Paul and Barbara first became involved with Our Place in the 1980s when the society was still known as the Upper Room and Open Door. Back then, they donated food, coffee cups ("Which were always needed," says Barb.), Christmas gifts and money.

"I could see how much need there was in the street community," says Barb. "And I would always feel better after dropping off what was needed."

When an appeal went out in the early 2000s for people to switch to monthly donations in order to give the society a dependable, regular income, Paul and Barb were immediately on board.

"Our Place has made a huge difference in the lives of the street community," says Paul. "The seven-day opening, plus involving the business community in providing breakfast, have been fantastic to see. Don Evans' leadership, along with the rest of the team, all contribute hugely to that success."

"We are happy to be involved in such a great organization," adds Barb, who also volunteers with Project Connect, "and will continue to do so."

See Page 8 for Monthly Donor details

Library gets Boost

Greater Victoria Public Library helps Our Place feed readers' minds

For many years, Carl Cavanagh, a librarian from the Greater Victoria Public Library, came by every Wednesday with bookmobile services for Our Place.

After funding cuts ended the mobile service, we asked Carl to help launch our new in-house library.

The library is run more like a free book shop. Family members are welcome to take books with no expectation that they be returned, although we do encourage them to do so.

The GVPL provides the book stock for the shelves, while Our Place continues to accept public donations to keep the collection fresh and interesting.

Things We Need

- WARM JACKETS**
- BLANKETS**
- SLEEPING BAGS**
- DRY GOODS**
- FRUIT**
- VEGETABLES**
- TOILETRIES**

WINTER IS HERE! 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 greatly appreciated.

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

NEW ARTWORK: Talented local artist and Our Place custodian John Martin Prevost paints an Orca on the stairwell leading from the ground floor Drop-In to the first-floor Dining Hall. John is also painting four of the concrete pillars in the Drop-In with his colourful artwork of hummingbirds and the sun. While working on this project, John received his three-year sobriety pin.



Creative Ways to Give



VETS FOR PETS: It's one of our favourite days of the month at Our Place when veterinarian Jane Vermeulen and her wonderful team of volunteers bring their skills to our courtyard to make sure low-income family pets are well taken care of. We also have a new team of volunteers who are making sure that our Pet Food Bank is stocked for all the cats and dogs.

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 operations.



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

Monthly Giving

Our monthly Circle of Love donors provide predictability. By spreading out your annual donations over 12 months, you help us plan and budget more effectively and reduce our mailing costs. We really couldn't do this without your help, and we thank everyone who participated in our recent phone campaign.

For more information, call Peter Papagiannis, Development Officer, 250.388.7122 ext 258 or visit our new website at ourplacesociety.com

Our Place Special Events

Family Day

Monday, Feb. 9, 2015

Carnival games, movies, popcorn, and prizes for the Family.

Hungry Hearts

Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2015

The Inn at Laurel Point will graciously host Hungry Hearts, our annual gala fundraiser, presented by PwC.

Community Easter Meal

Thursday, April 2, 2015

Noon - 2 pm

A special festive meal served by local dignitaries, volunteers and staff.

For more upcoming events, please visit our website: ourplacesociety.com



Special Thanks

We have been blessed by so many caring members of the community who have not only made financial contributions, but also delivered in-kind gifts from media advertising, printing, groceries, clothing, hygiene products, video production, photography, truck decals, and even a second-hand refrigerated truck.

New Signage

You may soon notice a new, LED-lit sign gracing our front entrance as we recently won 1st Place in a \$10K Christmas contest from Urban Signs.

 **ourplace**
Hope and Belonging

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

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