

Our Stories

SUMMER NEWSLETTER
2017

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Hope and Belonging

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

Executive Director's Message

I sat down to lunch in the Our Place dining room recently to chat with a man whose story I have heard far too often.

This vulnerable individual said he was going to end up back in prison soon because he was starting to commit crimes to feed his drug habit. He had tried short-term treatment programs in the past, but none had worked and he didn't know where to turn.

This cycle needs to end.

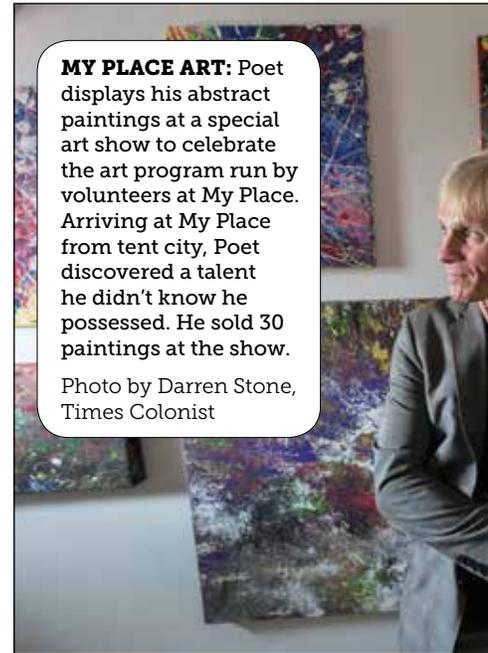
And, more importantly, Our Place has a solution.

Our Place envisions transforming Choices — our temporary transitional housing facility in View Royal — into a Therapeutic Recovery Community.

Working with Island Health, BC Housing, and the judicial system, I believe that we can make a positive impact in our community by ending this vicious cycle of homelessness to jail and back to the street.

Our vision is multi-faceted and intended to deliver a long-term recovery program in a safe, structured, therapeutic environment guided by professional staff. This therapeutic community will provide a cost effective path to recovery, and address a comprehensive perspective of addiction, homelessness, and criminality.

Our goal is that every individual who graduates from this program will be in control of his addiction, have a place to live, a job, and all the life skills necessary to not only survive in the wider community, but to thrive in it.



MY PLACE ART: Poet displays his abstract paintings at a special art show to celebrate the art program run by volunteers at My Place. Arriving at My Place from tent city, Poet discovered a talent he didn't know he possessed. He sold 30 paintings at the show.

Photo by Darren Stone, Times Colonist

We want to offer the opportunity of participating in the therapeutic community to the family Our Place currently knows and serves, and to others in the community who live in poverty, are marginalized, and are part of the hardest to reach population. We aim to accept referrals from BC Provincial Court, BC Corrections, and Island Health.

This is an ambitious initiative. We are working with our government partners and seeking private donors to ensure that we have the necessary funding and assurances, but I am very excited about the possibilities.

If you share our vision and want to help, I would love to hear from you. You can reach me personally at don@ourplacesociety.com

Warm Regards,

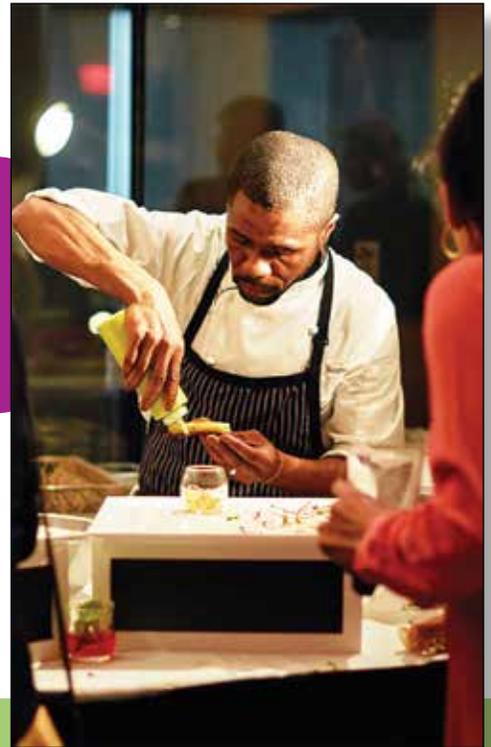
Don Evans
Executive Director

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, services and outreach offered would not have been possible without the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters. Thank you!



HUNGRY HEARTS: Unique fundraiser raises \$105,000 to help Victoria's most vulnerable.



Our Events

Hungry Hearts

The vibrant business and philanthropic community came together for Hungry Hearts, a unique fundraiser aimed at raising both awareness and funds for Our Place's meal program.

Four top local chefs used their culinary expertise and imagination in a fierce competition to see who could create the most popular savory bite.

"We are overwhelmed by the generosity of the community," said Don Evans, executive director of Our Place. "This strong support will enable us to continue meeting the needs of the hundreds of people who come to us

for help each day."

Guests were invited to "vote with their heart" in crowning their favourite dish. In a finger-licking finish, Chef Castro Boateng (pictured top right) of Castro Boateng catering took home the Hungry Hearts Top Chef trophy by creating a gourmet treat of Dungeness crab and mango cannelloni with papaya salsa on a purple yam crisp.

"Once people learn of all the wonderful ways Our Place helps the impoverished in our community, they really step up to help," said Lori Angelini, director of development.

The other competing top chefs were: Nicholas Waters of Toque catering, Takashi Ito of Inn at Laurel Point, and Tyler Paquette of Fish Hook. Plus two Our Place chefs, Emilie and Erica, created a special vegetarian risotto dish.

The event, presented by PwC Canada and hosted at the Inn at Laurel Point, raised \$105,000.

Easter Meal

Our Place hosted our annual Easter Meal with the hard-working support of our fabulous donors, volunteers, staff and local dignitaries. Over 700 people lined up to enjoy a family feast of roast pork, mashed potatoes, garden vegetables and gravy. And for dessert, peach cobbler. You can view a special video — created in-house — on our website at: ourplacesociety.com/easter-our-place-2017



To view all the latest news, updates, videos and photos be sure to visit our website at ourplacesociety.com or follow us on Facebook at: [facebook.com/ourplacesociety](https://www.facebook.com/ourplacesociety)



< **ST. PATRICK'S DAY:** Kitchen staff, family members and volunteers showed their Irish spirit during a special St. Patrick's Day breakfast donated and served by The Breakfast Club.

Our Family

Miatreya's Story

"It is overwhelming what you see on the streets. The pain, the suffering, and the children. My God, the children who are out there by themselves in the middle of the night. It's terrifying."

— Miatreya

When you first meet Miatreya, the vision of her working on an organic farm and raising her two sons isn't difficult to imagine. In fact, she fits the part perfectly.

And, for awhile, that was her life until drugs and addiction took it all away.

Miatreya was born in Victoria, but spent most of her formative years further north in Port Hardy. When she was 19, she moved in with her husband, Chris.

Living on a farm, Miatreya enjoyed a quiet and relatively isolated life, raising her two sons (one is now 14, the other 11) while Chris worked in construction.

When work dried up in Port Hardy, the family moved to the mainland — and that's where everything changed.

Seven years ago, the 40-year-old and her husband began experimenting with crystal meth, a highly addictive stimulant that delivers almost instant euphoria, followed by an increase in energy and alertness. The side effects, however, include severe anxiety, paranoia, and insomnia.

The long-term effects are even worse.

Miatreya's gaze drops to her hands as she talks about losing everything to drugs — including her two sons.

The boys were taken into foster care after their parents were arrested for possession of drug paraphenalia, including the necessary equipment to manufacture crystal meth.

Both boys have since been adopted.

After their arrest, Chris and Miatreya found themselves living in a van for over a year, couch surfing with friends, and then living in parks and under bridges.

"It was horrible," Miatreya says. "And that made us use drugs even more. I didn't want to sleep, so I used meth to stay awake. When Chris was working ..." her voice quavers and tears fill her eyes. "That's when I was raped."

As she talks, it becomes clear the assault wasn't an isolated incident. She refers to the



 **a legacy of love**
Provide hope and belonging for the future

Imagine knowing that it's possible for you to continue to help your neighbours in need for years to come. Naming **Our Place Society** in your will or estate plan is a fantastic way to leave a life-changing legacy that makes a compassionate difference in the lives of Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens for years to come. For more information call Lori Angelini, senior development officer, 250-413-3161 or visit our website at: www.ourplacesociety.com/ways-give/legacy-giving



men who live in the parks and prey on others as Creepers.

“Living on the street is where I discovered all the different types of homelessness,” she says. “Poverty, addiction, medical, criminal . . . there are so many ways people end up in the discard pile.”

The worst, however, is the children. Miatreya practically shakes as she remembers the faces of adolescents and young teens roaming the streets around Surrey and downtown Vancouver.

After going through detox at Creekside Withdrawal Management Centre in Surrey,

Chris and Miatreya moved back to the island.

“We had to get away,” she explains. “I couldn’t go back to those parks.”

In Victoria, the couple — known as The Otters — found themselves camping in the green space behind the provincial law courts. “There were only three tents at the time,” says Miatreya.

But as the small community grew into a raucous tent city, Miatreya’s anxiety levels skyrocketed. The couple packed up and headed to Beacon Hill park.

“Thank God for Our Place,” Miatreya says. “We ate there three times a day. I don’t know what we would have done.”

It wasn’t just food that Miatreya found, however. It was also compassion.

“When my anxiety was out of control, the outreach workers and spiritual care team would settle me down, and give me a quiet place to eat. Everyone treated me really respectfully.”

Living at Choices — Our Place’s transitional home in View Royal — now, the couple has been drug free for over two months. Chris is back at work in construction, and Miatreya is reconnecting with her children.

“Having an address and stability helps,” she says. “I’ve been getting letters and emails from them.” She is also holding out hope for a visitation soon.

Dr. Matthew Kittleson is running a free chiropractic clinic for several of our family members who are suffering from head and neck pain. When an Outreach team member identifies someone who could be helped by Dr. Kittleson, the family member is taken to his office, where he/she receives the appropriate X-Rays and adjustments until the problem is resolved.

**HEAD & NECK
CLINIC**

NEW AT OUR PLACE!

Our Programs

Overdose Prevention Site



CHEK TV: Reports on the POD — Our Place’s response to the overdose crisis

There are two startling statistics in the first three months of Our Place operating an Overdose Prevention Site in its courtyard.

The first is that staff have been able to respond to, on average, 30 drug overdoses per month. The second, and even more startling statistic during this deadly fentanyl epidemic, is there hasn't been a single fatality.

The reason for this is the care and attention of the staff inside the orange POD — or Place of Dignity.

Working alongside paramedics and harm reduction workers, Aura is Our Place’s Outreach Liaison.

“The POD is an extension of the Our Place Drop-In,” she says. “So the same supports are needed.”

The overdose crisis has taken its toll on staff as people they have known and worked with for years have been dying at an accelerated rate. Some of the people kept their addiction so far under the radar that often the outreach workers didn't know the person was using

drugs until staff had to administer Naloxone to save his/her life.

Having the paramedics on site has definitely helped with that fatigue, says Aura. The medical professionals are working alongside the outreach workers, which helps with the stress of finding someone you care about turning blue from an overdose.

“The POD has broken down that barrier of stigma,” says Aura. “And opened the door to really honest conversation.”

That conversation can be anything from a frank talk on drug use to discussions about how to get into detox and treatment.

“People are openly talking about what drugs aren't safe on the street,” says Aura. “There is a lot of peer support with everyone looking out for each other, and trying to keep people safe.”

The POD, funded by Island Health, averages around 100 visits per day. It is a vulnerable place to be, and that's exactly why it takes someone special to connect with people who are struggling, and to offer them support with compassion rather than judgement.



AURA: Outreach liaison

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE LEAVES IN OUR TEA POT

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 our Manager of Volunteers at 250-388-7112 Ext. 258.



Our Donors

If there is one group of individuals who understand the importance of warm food and shelter, it's the Victoria real estate community.

And when two past presidents of the Victoria Real Estate Board learned of the opportunity to sponsor breakfasts at Our Place, it was quickly transformed into an entire month of giving Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens a hearty and healthy start to the day.

After touring Our Place, Bev Highton and Eric Charman challenged their fellow VREB past presidents to Sponsor-A-Breakfast for \$500 at Our Place. That was three years ago, and the concept of sponsoring a month of breakfasts is now even bigger and better as the whole real estate community joined together and decided to sponsor the month of February.

"It's just fantastic to see the community of realtors coming together like this to help the less fortunate," says Don Evans, executive director of Our Place.

Highton and Charman have been impressed by the work being done at Our Place, and

welcomed the opportunity to become more involved.

"It was a natural fit for us," says Charman. "Waking up in the cold with nothing to look forward to is about as depressing as it gets. If we can help make someone's day just that little bit better, then it means the world to us."

One of the realtors who served up a cooked breakfast was Krista Voitchovsky of Re/Max Camosun. "It was so heartwarming to hear and see how much the breakfasts were appreciated. We didn't realize how many people were in such a desperate situation."

Voitchovsky was so moved by the experience that her team decided to sponsor and serve one breakfast every month. John Beaumier of Fair Realty also made the commitment to serve a monthly breakfast, along with The Breakfast Club that began in 2014.

Some of the realtors participating were: Fisgard Asset Management Corporation; Bill & Gail Pettinger; Eric Charman; NAI Commercial (Victoria) Inc.; Holmes Realty; The Preferred Homes Team; RE/MAX Camosun - Realtors@ Who Care; Premier Network Group; Royal LePage; RE/MAX Alliance Victoria; The Neal Estate Team; Proline Management Ltd.; Firm Management; Tony Zarsadias Personal Real Estate Group; The Breakfast Club; Jodie Farup, Century 21; Victoria Real Estate Board - Community Relations; DFH Real Estate Limited; The Mark Imhoff Group - Sotheby's International Realty Canada; and Fair Realty.



< VANCITY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION: Thanks to a grant from the Vancity Community Foundation and some private donors, Our Place has managed to secure a desperately-needed new delivery van at a special price from the good folks at Suburban Motors. The van will be used by our shipping/receiving department to pick up much needed donations.



Things We Need

- MEN'S CLOTHING**
- SUN SCREEN**
- LIP BALM**
- FLIP-FLOPS**
- SOCKS & UNDERWEAR**
- FIRST-AID PACKS**
- TENTS & TARPS**
- TOILETRIES**
- BLANKETS**
- DRY GOODS**
- BOTTLED WATER**
- FRUITS & VEGETABLES**

SUMMER IS ALMOST HERE! Our fellow citizens in need will feel the heat of day and chill of night on the streets of Greater Victoria. Empty your closets and garages to bring summer protection, food and blankets to Our Place. Donations can be dropped off at the front desk anytime of day or night. If you need assistance, please call 250-388-7112.

Creative Ways to Give



SOCK TOSS 2017: Our third annual Sock Toss, organized by Fairfield United Church, was a roaring success with several thousand pairs of socks donated. Plus, it was a fun way to engage and inform young students about the importance of clean, dry clothing for the homeless of our community. Rev. Beth Walker and Our Place Executive Director Don Evans brave a pummel of tossed socks. Photo by Don Denton, Victoria News

Winter Hours

Winter is always a challenge for Our Place as there is no worse feeling than sending someone out into the wet and cold because it's time to close our doors for the evening.

Thanks to the support of our donors, we were able to extend our hours from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. for the months of November through February. However, because this winter bared its teeth earlier than usual, we knew we had to do more.

Thanks to a \$50,000 grant from the City of Victoria, we extended our winter hours for an additional two months (October & March), giving us six full months of extended hours.

We also want to thank Butler Brothers and John McEown who matched your generous support.

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 up to 400 family members. Our talented kitchen staff prepares a cooked breakfast. A small fee of \$500 covers the cost of the food, and we encourage a financial donation on top. Lunches, dinners and summer barbeques can also be sponsored.



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

Our Place From the Heart



MAYA IS MMMMMMARVELOUS: Maya, right, stopped by Our Place with her parents to take a tour of one of the charities she most admires. She also presented a cheque for \$5,000 to help people who are struggling with homelessness. Front desk security, Thomas, accepts the donation.

Make a Donation

To speak with us regarding financial donations, address updates or tax receipt questions, please call:

250-413-3161

To donate clothing or in-kind gifts, please call our main reception number at **250-388-7112** or drop items off anytime at 919 Pandora Avenue.



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