



Our Stories

SUMMER NEWSLETTER
2020

inside

4



BENOIT

2

New CEO hired

It seems there is no place quite like Our Place

4

Our Family

"I left home for the first time at 14, then at 15, and then I didn't go back after 16."

6

Myths & Truths

The health impact of COVID-19 has been mercifully kind to the street community.

7

Our Donors

Volunteer inspired to create The Wellness Matching Fund

8

Creative Ways To Give

ADMIRE: Portraits of women leaders in our community



Hope and Belonging



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

Chief Executive Officer's Message

**Julian Daly
joins Our Place
as new CEO**



It seems there is no place quite like Our Place, and I feel truly blessed to have the chance to work alongside such dedicated and compassionate people.

When I first came to Canada — from Ireland via the UK — 15 years ago, I debated at length whether to make a life in Victoria or Edmonton. For reasons that seemed inexplicable to many, I chose Edmonton.

It was a wise choice. Edmonton was good to me, and most particularly offered the opportunity to work for 11 years amongst its homeless, largely indigenous, population. I spent 11 extraordinary years as the Executive Director of Boyle Street Community Services which is Edmonton's largest homeless serving organization.

Serving the most marginalized citizens with a harm reduction approach, advocating and educating around homelessness, poverty and racism related issues, and delivering needs driven programs and services taught me a great deal about Canada, especially indigenous peoples, about homelessness, and about a side of our country that remains invisible to most of our fellow citizens.

In something of a twist of fate, 15 years after that initial decision, I am to make my life in Victoria and to have the chance to serve in an organization as extraordinary and as vital to this city and its most marginalized citizens as Our Place.

It is a true blessing for me, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity.

As part of my work, I am looking forward to — and will make the time to — meet

with and build relationships with not just my colleagues and those we serve at Our Place, but also those of you who are our supporters and allies in the community.

Now, more than ever in these uncertain times, the staff, family, volunteers, donors and supporters of Our Place will need to work together to forge a future in the new reality that we all find ourselves in.

This future will continue to see us standing steadfast by the most marginalized in our community, ensuring they continue to receive the services they need and living the values, especially of unconditional love, which have always been at the heart of Our Place.

I look forward to connecting with you all in the coming weeks and months as we forge this new journey together.

With much gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Julian".

**Julian Daly
Chief Executive Officer**



THANK YOU!

IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC! The introduction of COVID-19 into our world changed the landscape on which we work, live and play. Our Place staff had to quickly find the best ways to continue delivering necessary services, such as meals, showers, sleeping bags, clothing, hygiene items, safety checks, paramedic services, and much more. From all of us on the front lines, thank you for your continued support. We can't do it without you.



in a time of pandemic



Our Family

Benoit's Story

"It's a blessing to be able to help the person I used to be."

— *Benoit*

Growing up in Montreal, Benoit had a very typical Canadian childhood until he became a teenager. That was when a predatory member of his extended family turned Benoit's world into one of shame, anger and despair.

"I left home for the first time at 14, then at 15, and then I didn't go back after running away at 16," he says.

His family didn't understand the dramatic change in their son because, like far too many young boys and girls, Benoit was too ashamed to talk about the abuse with them.

Instead, Benoit went to the street where he quickly found his niche with other runaways. The gang life provided friendship, protection and danger. Benoit began pedaling drugs and committing petty theft. His fists became his currency.

Before long, Benoit was arrested. With his family at a loss on how to control his anger, he ended up staying in a juvenile halfway house.

As time passed, his life on the street continued, as did his criminal activity.

Soon he landed in adult jail, serving two years less a day. While in jail, he was told that next time he was caught, his sentence would be severe.

In 1994, Benoit walked out of jail and decided that he needed a new start. Life with a street gang was putting his life in danger, and he wanted more for himself.

The Commonwealth Games were being hosted in Victoria that year. The promise of work, and a location on the other side of Canada from his old life, was appealing.

But the fresh start quickly crumbled as Benoit fell into old habits and addiction.

"I had no education, and didn't speak the language properly," he says, his French Quebecois accent still noticeable.

But then in 2004, Benoit received another wake-up call.

"My friend's suicide was such a shock that I made a decision: I was either going to take my own life or I was going to change it."

Thankfully, Benoit chose the latter.

After a short stint in detox — "I used drugs out of boredom rather than need."

BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR



JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF LOVE
PROGRAM TODAY

Why not join the many donors who have chosen to give monthly? This eco-friendly method ensures the money saved on printing and mailing receipts goes directly to providing food and services for people in need. Plus, you get more control over your giving because you can cancel or alter your gift at any time. And, we'll send you one receipt for your annual donation in time for filing your tax return. Interested? Please call our philanthropy team at 250-940-5060 to sign up.



FAMILY MAN: Benoit with his twin girls, Isabella and Gabriella, and wife, Tracy.

— Benoit began to hang out at the Open Door, one of the founding organizations of Our Place.

"One day, while I was hanging around, one of the janitors didn't show up and Bob Frank (Our Place's Facilities Manager) asked if I wanted to do some work. I took him up on it."

That one day of work turned into a couple more days, until eventually he was offered steady employment.

Benoit enjoyed the janitorial work.

"People saw that I was changing," he says. "And they would come up to

me for advice. When I say I know what struggle is, they see it in my eyes."

Bob noticed the way Benoit interacted with the other family members, and put forth the suggestion that he should be trained as an outreach worker.

Outreach Manager Jordan Cooper agreed to take Benoit under his wing.

"Then there was a lot of learning," says Benoit with a smile.

With a newfound purpose and direction, Benoit continued to blossom. His empathy, built-in-street-learned-BS detector, and compassion quickly

allowed him to find his groove, and today, he is now a Lead Outreach Worker.

Our Place also introduced Benoit to his wife, Tracy, who was volunteering alongside her mom.

"She caught my eye and I asked her out for coffee," he says. "Now we live together and have beautiful twin girls."

Even though she couldn't control him, Benoit's mother never gave up on him and is still part of his life today.

Benoit's eyes grow misty as he says, "I became the person that at 16, I never thought I could become."

Thank you to all our amazing volunteers still adhering to our temporary suspension of volunteer services through this challenging time. We appreciate your support. At this time, we are not actively recruiting new volunteers, rather we will be focusing on a reintegration plan for volunteers to return safely when the time is right.

VOLUNTEERS

IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

The Frontlines

Myths & Truths

By Grant McKenzie
Communications Director



The health impact of COVID-19 has been mercifully kind to the street community. As I write this, no cases of infection have been reported among the displaced masses who depend on Our Place to meet their daily needs.

For this, we are grateful.

The community aspect, however, has been devastating as hundreds of people found themselves in tents spread along a boulevard or in parks — and yet, Our Place continued to run its housing and shelters, which accommodate around 175 people.

This led to the most common question: Where did everybody come from?

The truth is, they were always here.

The myth that people travel here from other provinces in order to access our services is false. Our services are no better than any other province, and low-income people are most likely to move for the same reasons we all do: work or love.

The last homeless count in 2018 stated there were around 1,500 people who were inadequately housed in and around our city. A more recent count took place in March, but those results won't be out until later this summer. However, judging by how busy Our Place has been, we expect that number has gone up.

And another truth is: we can't count everybody, which means the total is always lower than the true number of homeless on our streets.

What this pandemic did was make homelessness more visible. People on the edge of being evicted; people no longer able to couch surf as friends went into isolation; people curled up in doorways, back alleys,

and dumpsters; people choosing to leave their own isolation in local woods and parks to become part of a community; people hoping to get into permanent housing; and even those battling addiction who want to be closer to their dealer or a supervised injection site.

And while many in the community recoiled at this grim sight, and the increase in criminality that tends to circle these encampments like predatory wolves, others stepped up to voice their concern and encourage our three levels of government to find a permanent solution.

The first step to this solution has been in moving people out of tents and crowded boulevards into hotel rooms and shelter pods. Hand-in-hand with that move was the loud voice that advocated for supports; a voice that, thankfully, fell on receptive ears.

Without the wraparound supports to deal with immediate issues of mental health, drug addiction, physical impairment, despair and fear, housing by itself will fail.

As restrictions begin to relax, Our Place is exploring what its next steps will be. With a new CEO at the helm, we are looking forward to working with our government partners, donors, volunteers and business supporters in providing unconditional love, hope, belonging and nourishment to the street family.

And more than that, we want to continue to be part of the solution by providing real pathways out of addiction, training for those seeking work, and advocating for more housing and mental health supports.

If COVID-19 taught us anything, it is that our community is stronger when we all work together.



VERONICA OSBORN: Our Place volunteer and donor

Our Donors

Our Place – out of concern for safety and health – asked its 800+ volunteers to stay at home. Yet staff remain ‘on the frontlines’ continuing to care for our street family.

Long-time Our Place volunteer, Veronica Osborn, was shocked by the necessary changes Our Place made in light of COVID-19. And yet she was also inspired by watching how that care continued to be delivered on the front lines.

Having worked in the public and private sectors, Veronica saw an opportunity to make a difference, and in her usual leadership style, stepped up!

Initially, she made a \$1,000 donation to provide hot takeout meals for a day, then she covered the cost of replacing the broken commercial washer and dryer at the My Place shelter to ensure the 48 residents had clean clothes and bedding. But that still left her wondering what more she could do.

Volunteering at Our Place offered her the

unique opportunity to listen and observe the frontline workers in action: their unwavering level of commitment, compassion and composure in caring for those they serve. And that motivated her to offer a \$10,000 donation as a matching goal to establish **The Wellness Fund for Our Place Frontline Workers.**

This fund will help Our Place provide a series of self-care, supportive training sessions for the frontline workers for years to come. Topics covered will include how to deal with trauma, loss, violence and injustice when caring for others — as well as how to take care of themselves. Veronica also hopes it will help re-energize and inspire them to continue their selfless work.

“Self-care for frontline workers is critical, and we are very grateful to Veronica for initiating this fund to recognize the importance of their work” says Marion Hoadley, HR Manager at Our Place.

“I invite others to join me in respecting and honouring these frontline workers so they can thrive — not just survive — when caring for our most vulnerable neighbours,” says Veronica. “Doing so means delivering hope, belonging and community for those they serve.”

WELLNESS FUND FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

Please join Veronica in recognizing and supporting our courageous outreach team by donating to the Wellness Fund for Frontline Workers.

For every dollar you donate, the fund could grow by two!

Online donations can be made at <https://www.ourplacesociety.com/donate> and note **Wellness Fund** in the text box to count towards the matching challenge, or call **250-940-5060** from 8am – 5pm on weekdays.

Thank you for your compassion and concern.



< **GET CONNECTED:** While we'd love to deliver more newsletters by email to save costs, we can't because we don't have everyone's email addresses. If you would like to join our thousands of donors who already receive their news via email, simply opt in via donors@ourplacesociety.com or phone Donor Services at 250-940-5060 to sign up. Thank you!

Creative Ways to Give



Give the Gift of Love On Father's Day



Downloadable Card \$25
**Featuring Benoit's
Journey to Fatherhood**
Proceeds to Our Place

www.ourplacesociety.com/Fathers-Day-Gift

ADMIRE: Portraits of women leaders in our community

There are so many women in our community who deserve our admiration — and Our Place invites you to join in this celebration.

An online gallery was created by renowned local artist **Elfrida Schragen** as a unique project to benefit Our Place Society during this time of crisis.

Money raised will support Our Place in helping some of Greater Victoria's most vulnerable women struggling with poverty, mental or physical health challenges, or homelessness. This includes, our Women in Progress project – a skills training program helping women secure employment and a brighter future.

And during the pandemic, financial donations will also support core facilities and cover staff costs as they continue filling roles previously held by volunteers (who have been asked to stay safe at home).

The current economic downturn has caused a reduction in our usual sources



of revenue, but unfortunately our food and paramedic outreach and facilities costs remain the same! Your support today will truly make a difference!

How You Can Join in this Celebration of Women:

Please visit the Online Gallery www.ourplacesociety.com/events/admired and check out all Elfrida's portraits and read each individual's story. Then, please pay tribute to the portrait that speaks to you by making an online donation to Our Place Society.

Each portrait has a goal of \$1,000. You can also contact Our Place for more information at 250-940-5064 or stevens@ourplacesociety.com

Our Place From the Heart



Thank you to the businesses, community groups, families and individuals who have sponsored meals for the hungry and hurting during the COVID crisis.

The need has never been greater! Every day Our Place serves hundreds of meals while providing vital services and outreach support. Go to www.ourplacesociety.com/ways-give/sponsor-meal-0 to see the names of those who helped provide nutritious comfort food and served your community in a meaningful way.

If you or your organization would like to sponsor a meal (\$600 will provide a hot dinner, while \$1,000 will sponsor a full day of three meals) or you have further questions about how you can help, please contact Steven at stevens@ourplacesociety.com or 250-940-5064

Make a Donation

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

250-940-5060

 **ourplace**
Hope and Belonging

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

Join the online conversation!
facebook facebook.com/ourplacesociety
twitter twitter.com/ourplacesociety
Registered Canadian Charity
82709 8344 RR0001



Visit our website: ourplacesociety.com