

A Life of Change

How Housing Makes a Difference



nourish
change



By Grant McKenzie,
Director of Communications

Born in Victoria, Leslie moved at a young age with her family to Hawaii where she graduated high school and attended university. From there, she travelled to Paris, where her sister was attending university. On a trip to Spain, Leslie attended a bullfight where she caught the eye of a bullfighter.

“At the end of a bullfight, the women in the audience throw roses into the ring,” she says. “The matador gave all his roses to me and asked to meet at a bar after.”

Leslie dated the bullfighter for six years and was engaged to be married, but things didn’t work out. At the same time, Leslie won a small lottery and moved to Athens, Greece. She lived there for three years before moving back to Victoria to help care for her grandparents.

In Victoria, she married a navy senior officer. The marriage lasted 15 years before the strain of long absences brought it to an end in 2000.

Leslie moved back to Hawaii where she discovered a joy of real estate and ended up building her own home. She also ran two graphic design companies. In her early 40s, Leslie became involved with a new man and gave birth to a baby daughter. Life seemed perfect again, but then the first in a series of horrors struck.

The man fled Hawaii with their daughter, and Leslie spent all her life savings trying to track them down. She has not seen her daughter in over 10 years.

Heartbroken, Leslie returned to Victoria to look after her ailing parents. Sadly, she lost both her mother and father, and the grief of losing them on top of her missing daughter played havoc with her health.

“I got really sick,” she says. “Double pneumonia.”

Leslie had been working at a local university at the time, but the illness left her too weak to continue. When she left her job, she lost her apartment. Without a job and an eviction notice on her record, Leslie became destitute at the age of 56.

“I’m so grateful to Our Place,” she says. “They took me in and gave me a mat at the First Met shelter.” Leslie lived at the night shelter for 18 months until the COVID pandemic hit. Hoping for more permanent housing, Leslie chose to erect a tent on the Pandora boulevard. Not wanting to be idle, Leslie picked up odd jobs and volunteer shifts around Our Place.

But when Our Place closed its doors at night, the streets became dangerous. “I got robbed,” she says, her voice cracking with emotion. “I got beat up. All kinds of things. My purse and knapsack got stolen three times. It was very difficult for me.” She wipes tears from her eyes. “It’s their addiction,” she adds. “People thinking that maybe I had money, or I’d hear rumours about me that weren’t true, and people would target me.”

Lost and afraid, Leslie was one of the first people selected to move indoors when BC Housing leased the Howard Johnson hotel. Her room has a bright window; ensuite bathroom, TV, large, comfortable bed, and room for her sewing machine – one of her few possessions that wasn’t targeted by thieves.

“I love it,” she says, a smile replacing the tears. “I’m very fortunate, and I thank God for Our Place because without them, where would I be now?”



Thank you!

We can’t do all of this work without you! We are truly grateful to everyone who contributes to Our Place and helps us nourish change in our community. Consider donating today – make a one-time donation, become a monthly donor, leave a legacy in your will, or make a donation of time by giving us a call at 250-940-5060, email us at donors@ourplacesociety.com, or visit us at www.ourplacesociety.com/make-donation/nourish-change

TV SCENE INSIDE

Nourishing Change Each and Every Day

Spring is the season of change – as days brighten and new growth blooms in our beautiful city, we begin to see signs of life and renewal. But renewal is happening beyond just a change in season. Here at Our Place, we have the privilege of witnessing extraordinary change and growth every day. Some think of Our Place as simply a soup kitchen, but the hundreds of meals we serve (three times daily, year-round, even throughout the pandemic), are just the beginning. Here are a few examples of how – together with the help of our kind and generous donors and supporters – we work to nourish change and help people who are struggling with homelessness, poverty, addictions and physical and mental health issues rebuild their lives.

Housing

Through our shelters and the leased hotels we manage, Our Place is housing over 400 people. Last spring it was less than a third of that. And with housing comes great opportunities for change. Having a physical address is an important aspect of day-to-day life that a lot of us take for granted – providing a roof over someone's head in a supportive housing environment, means they can apply for documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, library cards and other necessities. This can help them move forward in their lives. ***We have recently helped several residents move into their own housing. And having a home address has helped five other residents find either part-time or full-time employment.***

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“It's heartwarming to watch how providing someone with a warm place to live, meals and support – perhaps for the first time in years – leads to confidence and self-respect,” said Cathy Mingo, Manager of Housing and Shelters. “For those whose lives have been negatively affected when their security vanished, Our Place offers them a place to re-learn who they are, giving them the space and security to help them build trust and grow.”

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New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community

New Roads is a unique therapeutic recovery community on Vancouver Island that's dedicated to ending the cycle of substance use disorder, criminality and homelessness through a two-year residential care program. The men who come to live at New Roads are highly motivated to make positive changes in their lives and, within a safe, supportive atmosphere, they explore and discover new attitudes, values, and ultimately a new way of life. In February 2021, 27 people called New Roads home.

“A resident who was with us for two years began his journey being homeless and addicted to drugs for many years,” said Cheryl Diebel, Director of New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community. “When he came to our community his physical health was failing and his emotional stability was frail. After two years in the program, he was able to access medical and emotional well-being supports through our counselling area. He was also encouraged and supported to pursue his artistic skills in the arts

room at the Centre. He thrived and slowly began his recovery. ***Last month he moved back into the greater community after two years of recovery and sobriety, and today he's now enrolled in an arts therapy post-secondary educational program.*** This is just one small example of the positive impact that donations to this program have on the lives of the men we serve.”

Food Services

Meals are at the heart of everything we do – a nourishing meal is often what brings those we serve through our doors, but when they come to us for meals, we get the chance to spend time with them and offer them some support and care. We are able to assist them to regain their dignity and connect them to a path of positive change. ***Staff at the Our Place kitchen proudly prepare 600 - 800 meals every day – including processing over 300 pounds of fruits and vegetables each day, ensuring every meal is balanced and nutritious.*** We're also keeping it local by supporting local farmers and businesses whenever possible.



Our WorkPlace

The mission at Our WorkPlace is to support and encourage people to take a step towards independence and employment – finding and securing a rewarding job brings confidence, enthusiasm and the desire for change in folks who want to be vibrant members of the community. We work one-on-one with clients and offer extensive workshop programs to provide them with job readiness skills and training. Our support continues when clients move into the workforce, as we recognize the transition back into employment isn't always smooth. Our clients live with multiple barriers to employment including mental health concerns, homelessness, substance abuse and physical disabilities. We work with very supportive local employers who understand the benefit of offering employment to clients who need some extra support in the beginning.

“One of our recent successes came to us with a client who spent the majority of his life in prison,” said Ashley MacDonald, Manager of Our WorkPlace. “The only work experience he had was from behind bars. **Today, he has been employed for five months and has found safe, reliable housing. This February, 20 people applied to our job readiness program, and already three clients have obtained employment.**”

Volunteer Services

Volunteers are the backbone of Our Place Society and, while the pandemic significantly impacted the number of volunteer opportunities we had available, **350+ volunteers still gave well over 15,000 hours of service in 2020.** Volunteers are absolutely vital



to our team and their contributions make it possible to serve meals, run programs, operate our facilities and help encourage change in the most vulnerable citizens of Greater Victoria. By offering their time and talents, they also get to be part of the laughter, friendship and sharing that happens between volunteers, employees and family members every day – both remotely and in person.

National Volunteer Week is April 18 - 24 and we're already celebrating our amazing volunteers. This year's theme is The Value of One, The Power of Many, reflecting on the awe-inspiring acts of kindness by individuals AND the magic that happens when we work together towards a common purpose. Despite the uncertainty everyone faced with COVID, we are deeply grateful for their continued support this year, and we can't wait to welcome all of our dedicated volunteers back to help us **nourish change** and provide hope and belonging to those we serve.

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“I started out as a family member, lost and hopeless, who used the life-saving resources this place has to offer,” said an anonymous Our Place volunteer. “I grew to really appreciate the people and the staff for the work that they do, so I knew one day I wanted to volunteer. I have come a long way from who I was when I was first introduced to this place. I have my own life again, but will never forget where my life had a huge turning point for the good. I've been there and I still connect with the family members. Volunteering and working with staff helps me to continue to grow as a person.”

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nourish change

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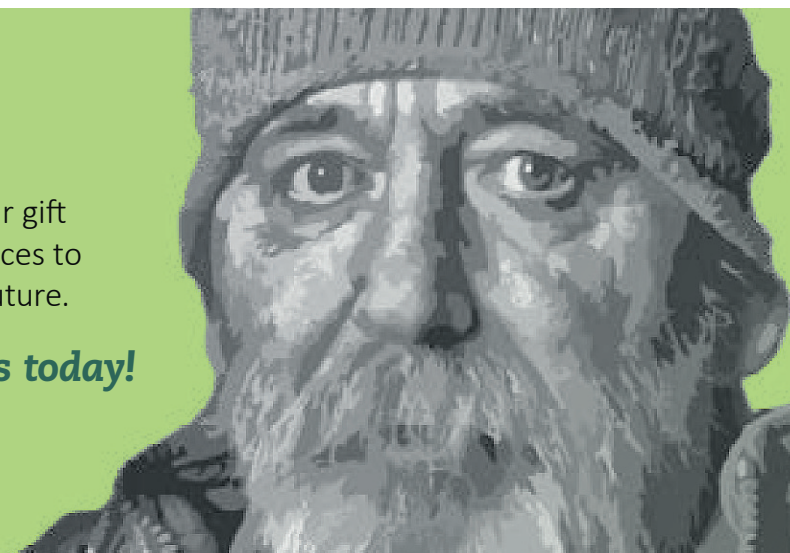


Our kitchen is open to all facing tough times.

Nobody is turned away at Our Place. Your gift supports meals, plus programs and services to help give people a hand up to a better future.

Help us nourish change in lives today!

**[www.ourplacesociety.com/
make-donation/nourish-change](http://www.ourplacesociety.com/make-donation/nourish-change)**
Phone: 250-940-5060





Victoria Police came out to walk and support Our Place during this year's Coldest Night of the Year.

Spoken Word Contest!

Were you moved by the passionate words of Amanda Gorman at the 2020 inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden and VP Kamala Harris? Can you turn words into a heartfelt spoken word poem pleading for local compassion and empathy to nourish change?

YES! Send your video clip to donors@ourplacesociety.com by Tuesday, April 30 at 4 p.m. A team of judges will review all entries and announce winners of the following prizes by noon on May 21st.

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| 1ST PRIZE | - \$200 gift certificate to Big Wheel Burger, to be used in 2021 at any of their five locations |
| 2ND PRIZE | - \$100 gift certificate to Big Wheel Burger |
| 3RD PRIZE | - \$50 gift certificate to Virtuous Pie |
| 4TH PRIZE | - \$25 gift certificate to CAKES ETC. |

All entries will be eligible for sharing on Our Place social media channels, and require a photo release form to accompany the submission if people's faces are shown.

Visit ourplacesociety.com/events/nourishing-change-spoken-word to read the poem, submit your video and photo release forms, and find out more information.

Or scan this code on your phone
to visit the page now!



Thank you to everyone who supported the Coldest Night of the Year Walk this year...

...For stepping up, signing up, fundraising and walking to help those in need in our community.

The Victoria walk raised over \$112,000 with 59 teams and 350 walkers while the WestShore walk, raised \$33,500 with 27 teams and 156 walkers. Those two amounts together place us in the top 10 of the 150 cities/charities who participated across Canada. Please know that you have made, and are making, such a positive impact to the lives of hungry and hurting people in Greater Victoria.

Thank you to our WestShore charity partner, Pacific Centre Family Services Association.



Thank you to our Sponsors and Supporters



TIMES COLONIST

