



NEWSLETTER Fall2011

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Executive Director's Message

by Sandra Danco

Since joining Our Place Society on July 4, 2011 I have felt privileged to be working with a dedicated board of directors and outstanding staff. I look forward to learning from our donors and supporters and the men and women that use our facility, in order to continue the important and unique role that Our Place has in Victoria. One of the first things I noticed in this role is the dignity that Our Place Society offers the vulnerable citizens of Victoria, those who may not be experiencing this most basic human right. This observation brings to mind a quote from Mother Theresa.

“At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by ‘I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was homeless and you took me in.’ Hungry not only for bread -- but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing -- but naked for human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks -- but homeless because of rejection.”

Some of us are uncomfortable with concepts of judgment and eternal reward. However, everyone can relate to offering human dignity and respect to those that are vulnerable. Because of your generous support, Our Place is currently open from Monday to Friday, 7:00am to 5:00pm. We want to do better. Our goal is to be open seven days a week, to offer meals, housing, health and wellness, education and practical care as well as the dignity of a safe space to anyone who needs it. No homeless person should have to wake up and have nowhere to go for a meal, a shower, or the encouragement of an Outreach worker who cares.

When police awaken men and women that are sleeping in alleyways and bushes, they can point them to Our Place as a welcoming home where all that come are able to have the human dignity of using a clean washroom, having a hot shower, finding clean clothing, eating a warm meal or searching out a listening ear.

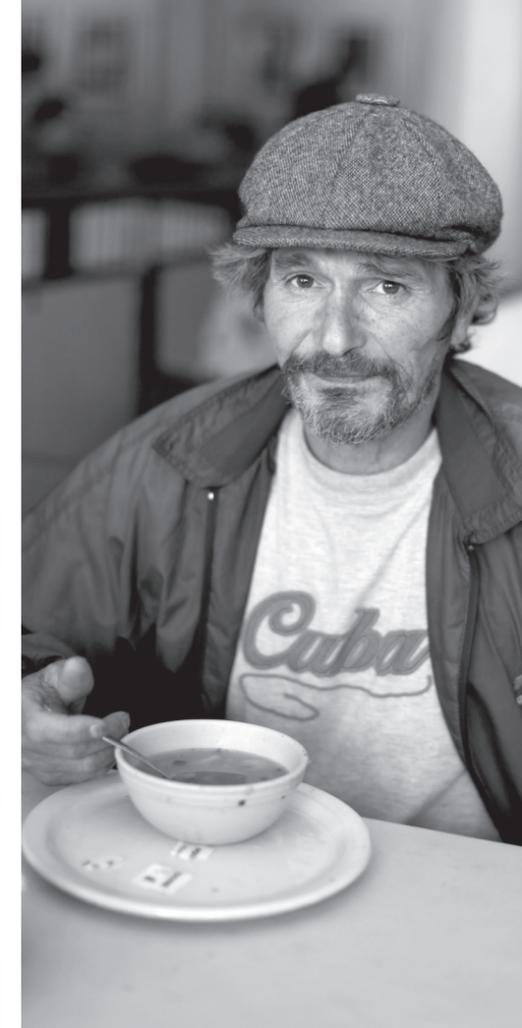
More and more frequently Our Place is serving those that are affected by poverty, health conditions and lack of access to housing affordability. I have met family members who once had the dignity of employment and are no longer working because of a workplace injury. It is these people, and so many more, who will immediately feel the positive affects when we are able to be open every day of the week.

I am thankful that – because of your support – we are currently able to offer services five days per week. But poverty and want do not take the weekends off. I eagerly anticipate the day when our family members can come in for a hot breakfast on a rainy Saturday morning, or take a shower before going to a church service on a Sunday morning. The long term goal is be open every day of the week, in order to provide hope, belonging, and practical help to the people that look to Our Place as their home. I look forward to working with our faithful partners, donors and supporters as we continue to enhance the good work that has been established.

Biography

Sandra comes to Our Place Society with over 20 years of experience in the human services field, including 10 years in executive roles at the Centre for Children's Justice and Victim Services, the Portage Women's shelter, and the Edmonton Women's Shelter, where she was most recently Executive Director.

Sandra's education includes a diploma in theology, and a BA in Social Development from the University of Waterloo, which she earned while raising two children with her husband Rick. Sandra's passion for working with vulnerable populations compliments her action-oriented approach to making a lasting difference in the communities she serves.



Your Help Makes a Difference.

Your Thanksgiving gift can transform a life.

This Thanksgiving, hundreds of people will walk through the doors of Our Place Society, and each one has a personal story – a story of loss and loneliness, hardship and courage. With a gift of just \$2.79, you will offer one person the opportunity to enjoy a hot, healthy meal this Thanksgiving. But to someone in need, the Our Place Thanksgiving meal is so much more. It could be a conversation with an outreach worker who helps them into a treatment centre or housing. It could inspire a friendship with someone who understands the hardship that they have gone through. Your contribution will truly make a difference in somebody's life.

On October 6, 2011, the staff and volunteers at Our Place Society will serve over 1000 hot Thanksgiving meals. It costs only \$2.79 to feed one person, and we rely on your support.

This Thanksgiving, you can help feed hungry souls and give them the chance to have a brighter future, simply by providing a meal. Thank you for giving generously.

Why do you donate?

“The main reason I continue to donate to Our Place Society is because I believe it is an entirely worthwhile endeavor. My own daughter ended up on the streets of Vancouver years ago and I have imagined if there had been a place like yours to take her in and show an interest, her journey through life might have been a little less painful.”

– Betty

“I respect the effort Our Place makes, the selflessness of the staff, the humility of the organization. Those in need, the helpless and hopeless of the street are who I wish to see helped.”

– Patrick

“Our Place fills a vital role in our community; a role that needs support from those who do not need to use Our Place. I am delighted to be able to afford to donate to this very worthwhile organization.”

– Marion



Family Focus:

Dominic

by Emily McDougall

From behind the security desk at Our Place Society on Pandora Avenue, Dominic, or “Dom” to his friends, greets nearly everyone who comes in the door with a smile and a “How’s your day going?” You would never know that two and a half years ago, he was on the other side of the security desk, going up the elevator to his room in Our Places’ transitional housing as he battled an addiction to heroin and cocaine.

Raised in Victoria, Dominic took his first drink at age eleven. He clearly remembers downing a mixture of gin and orange juice, followed by red cooking wine from his parents liquor cabinet, with scope from the bathroom cabinet. At fourteen, Dominic tried his first drug, LSD. Over the next few years, while experimenting with the LSD, mushrooms and alcohol, Dominic scraped through high school, never interested enough to excel, but always getting by in the end. After moving out at age 18, he fell harder into the world of drugs. Working in the restaurant industry encouraged a constant party scene and Dom talks about his first experience with shooting heroin: “That was it. I had found the solution to my problems. I felt like I found that missing piece that I had never known before.”

After a few years of heavy partying, heroin grew to become his drug of choice. The next few years remained a blur for Dominic, as his life passed by under the blanket of opiates. Sometimes clean for weeks at a time, he would always fall back into the vicious cycle. Already living with shame for where he had ended up, each relapse made him feel instantaneous guilt. “It becomes bone-crushing,” he describes: “I attempted suicide at those times, feeling so ashamed of myself. Other times, I would just wait until I was down enough to sleep and then I would pass out.” When Dom’s girlfriend at the time announced that she was pregnant, he spiraled down once again. However, by the time his son was born, he was clean and managed to stay that way for the first year of his son’s life. But as before, he eventually relapsed.

His addiction claimed his job, and, unable to afford housing, Dominic sold all his belongings – including his beloved musical equipment – to pay for the drugs. Addicted, homeless and without support, he had hit rock bottom, “I would try to wander around and stay high. If I could, I would stay in street shelters or on friends couches” he relates. “I thought I was doomed to die. Two suicide attempts, two overdoses, being brought back to life in an ambulance. My life felt done.”

After years of this pattern, someone suggested that Dominic talk to Bob, the building manager at Our Place Society, where he often stopped in to eat and use the hygiene facilities. Bob, along with an OPS addictions worker, found a room in Our Place transitional housing for him to attempt becoming clean once again.

“Our Place picked me up from hopelessness, from not knowing where I was going. They housed me and got me into treatment. They started the ball rolling. I was just a shell of a human and they got me back into recovery, heading in the right direction again.”

Dom spent the next season of his life living between Our Place Society, detox programs, and treatment centers as he relapsed twice more. Throughout the battle, Our Place became Dom’s safe space during some of the loneliest and most difficult moments in his life. After his last treatment, he describes having a massive spiritual epiphany, “It just hit me - the unmistakable presence of God. It felt a hundred thousand times more ecstatic than any dope I had done. I saw that the only way I could get anywhere was to give up the fight.”

Today, Dominic is two and a half years clean. He spends every weekend with his son and you can often see his band at gigs around town, playing songs that he has written himself, as part of his journey. Working security at Our Place Society and as a support worker at Cedar’s treatment centre, Dominic looks and feels like a new man. He shares his story openly with groups dealing with addictions, believing that relating to his journey can help others begin and carry on their own recovery paths. His spirit and his story touch everyone who comes across his path and his presence is a constant blessing at Our Place Society.

Transitional Housing

Thanks to Our Place Society’s transitional housing program, 45 people will have a safe place to sleep tonight. The bustle of conversation and meals on the first two floors of our building on Pandora usually steal the attention of volunteers and visitors. But the top three floors house 45 units of quiet sanctuary for those like Dominic, who are pulling their lives back together. These 45 private rooms are designed and fully

equipped to help each resident feel at home, in a supportive and caring environment. Three of these units are dedicated to short term housing, for people who are waiting for a spot in a detoxification or rehabilitation program. The other 42 rooms are for those who are committed to moving toward independent living. Each resident works in consultation with an Our Place Society support worker and, if necessary, a mental health and addictions worker. Together

they develop a plan to overcome the challenges that stand between the resident and his or her dream of living a full, rich and independent life.

Transitional Housing Statistics

45 affordable housing units, **3** of which are dedicated to short-term turnaround.

122 people transitioned from our short-term housing to drug and alcohol recovery programs

140 people have had affordable accommodation in our long-term transitional housing

66 women and **211** men have been through our facility

44 people have transitioned and moved into longer term housing

Around the Facility:

A Newcomer's Perspective by Emily McDougall

Dignity. We all know what it means, but I had never taken time to consider how it looks. Upon starting my new position at Our Place Society, dignity has a new definition for me.

Most of us take dignity for granted, but many people in our community do not

months. Or that they do not have a place to call home.

As I walk around Our Place, I see the dignity that flows from the small details. The first adjustment is the way we talk about those we serve – they're not "clients," they're family.

with care. "I wouldn't want to shower in a dirty stall, so I make sure our family doesn't have to." Marc says, "The hygiene facilities give our family members the ability to spend some time on themselves, hopefully allowing them to wash away their worries for awhile."

Walking from the showers to the clothing area, I watch as Jess, a volunteer, sorts clothes. Laughing, she holds up a dress, "Wouldn't this be perfect for Susan?" she says, referring to one of our family members, as she puts it aside, "I think I saw her having lunch upstairs...I'm going to bring it to her."

In the drop in centre, I see Kym, one of our Outreach Workers. I notice that even though she is busy, she always takes the time to personally greet individual family members, offering a smile, a laugh and a listening ear when they need it.

Coming in early one morning, I watch the volunteers who are serving breakfast. It is 7:00 am and people are hungry. I'm tired because I'm there so early, but after watching the two volunteers greet each and every family member with a warm smile and a 'how are you this morning?' my mood immediately improves.

I see it in every facet of this organization. From the cleanliness, the thoughtfulness of food preparation, the clean clothes hung neatly for people to take from, the smiles and jokes thrown out constantly. Everyone belongs here. Everyone is respected. And every single person is offered dignity.

Steve, our lead custodian, heads into the washroom after the family members have cleared out for lunch. "We clean the washrooms multiple times a day. We take pride in keeping the building spotless for the family and the residents. We want them to feel like they are at home."

Scott, one of our cooks, spends extra time ensuring that each meal has the essence of healthy, home cooked cuisine. As he prepares turkey à la king for dinner, he shares, "Providing people with nutritious and well-prepared food shows them that we care, that we are all part of the same family."

Marc, a volunteer in the hygiene area, heads into the showers after every single use. Following him, I realize that they are cleaner than my shower at home has ever been. They are scrubbed, washed and dried

experience basic human dignity day to day. It may be that not a single person looks them in the eye all day as they are passed on the street. Or that they walk around in wet, ill-fitting shoes throughout the winter



Annual Summer Baseball Game a Success!

Your gifts made our annual baseball game and barbeque a huge success! We had a record number of people, with 600 hot dogs and ice creams served in Beacon Hill Park's Heywood Field.

The annual Our Place baseball games are eagerly anticipated by staff and family members alike, as a great way to spend a day in the sun, enjoy good company and celebrate summer. Everyone is encouraged to don a glove and ball cap and head out to the field.

Steve, a housing worker, who kept busy driving people back and forth from Pandora to Beacon Hill Park all morning, gives his take on the importance of the day, "When they're here at the ball game, they are part of a team. Through playing, eating and laughing together, they end up forming a bond with each other and with the staff. The baseball game helps our family members build a community where there may not have been one before."

Because of your contributions, we can continue to offer a hand-up, support, hope and belonging to the vulnerable citizens of Greater Victoria. Thank you for your generous gifts!



Program Focus:

Acupuncture by Ted van Hemert, R.Ac.

Acupuncture is one of the oldest forms of medicine, used to encourage the restoration of health and well-being through the insertion of extremely fine needles into the skin. It is a clinically proven method for many chronic health problems. Simple treatment protocols can make a vast difference in the patients' sense of well-being while improving all aspects of life.

Our Place family members are among those most in need of the benefits of acupuncture. In my experience, acupuncture is most effective in high-stress situations, such as living on the street or struggling with addiction. Direct advantages can include significant decreases in anxiety, nausea, moodiness, sleeplessness and pain. Being able to provide acupuncture at Our Place Society allows for barrier free treatment for people who have difficulty accessing other programs due to cultural, linguistic, or behavioral challenges.

My goal in working is to help the Our Place community members by treating anxiety, stress, and pain, so that their over-all outlook on life and attitude is reflected in the community. I believe that acupuncture can help bring stability and a sense of calm to those who need it in most in our community.

Ted van Hemert, R.Ac is a licensed acupuncturist with a specialized practice in chronic pain, stress and addictions. He currently provides Acu-detox services at two other facilities in Victoria, as well as teaches acupuncture at a local college. He has been in practice for 10 years. He is thrilled to be able to volunteer his time at the weekly acupuncture clinic at Our Place.





Request for Socks

We need your socks! We are always in need of new or gently used socks to give to our family members. Living on the street or in poverty makes it difficult to have proper footwear, let alone clean and dry socks. Help people like Tyler take care of themselves by donating new or gently used socks.

In addition to socks, we appreciate any new or gently used clothing, hygiene supplies (travel size is the best!), shoes, backpacks, blankets and any food item.

Drop offs can be made at our reception at 919 Pandora Avenue.
For more information, call 250-388-7112

New Look

This Fall, Our Place Society was excited to launch our new website. With a fresh look and a focus on being user-friendly, we are sure you will be able to access information easily, make a donation and find out anything you would like to know about Our Place Society.

We are also on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, so check us out at ourplacesociety.com to donate, volunteer or just to stay updated on what is going on!

Practical Care

Our drop-in centre offers a place where family members are welcomed, offered a listening ear and a place to relax. Here, they can access various services, including but not limited to computers, library, mail and messaging centre and a free clothing area.

Drop-in Centre – 7:00am - 5:00pm, Monday - Friday
Clothing Area – 9:00am - 3:00pm, Monday - Friday

Health and Wellness

Our shower and footcare facilities, in addition to our holistic healthcare programs offer people the opportunity to spend time on caring for themselves.

Shower Facilities – 9:00am - 3:00pm, Monday - Friday
Footcare – Monday - Thursday mornings, September - April
Acupuncture – 1:00pm - 3:00pm, Friday

Meals

Our Place Society serves three warm, nourishing meals per day, five days per week. In between the hours that breakfast, lunch and dinner are served, Our Place offers a nutrition bar where people can find hot coffee or tea, baked goods and fruit to help sustain them throughout the day.

Breakfast – 7:00am - 8:00am, Monday - Friday
Lunch – 11:30am - 12:30pm, Monday - Friday
Dinner – 4:00pm - 5:00pm, Monday - Friday
Nutrition Bar – 8:00am - 11:30am, 12:30pm - 3:30pm, Monday - Friday