

Our Stories

FALL NEWSLETTER 2013

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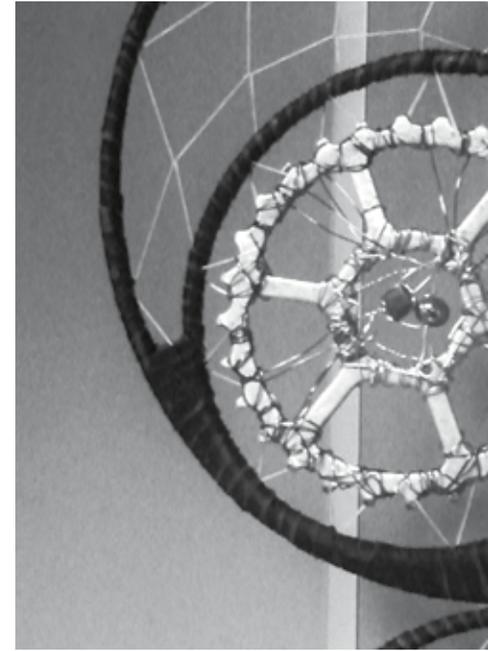
Executive Director's Message

Each September I reflect on the many blessings that summer has brought and this summer has been no exception.

As we continue to implement our strategic plan, we're encouraged to see how much the lives of family members are being touched and transformed. Every day people are taking courageous steps to confront the dire realities they face. Our staff is always supportive of our mission to provide a sense of hope and belonging to Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens.

At Our Place we're excited that our extended hours on weekends enable us to reach out to more people in need, and to those who want to embrace the opportunities we make available. With a greater offering of programs and services than ever before, family members are better able to meet their needs for social, mental, spiritual and physical well-being.

This fall, with the help of volunteers and local agencies, Our Place began offering a number of new programs including psychotherapy, cooking classes, storytelling and the UVic law clinic. We look forward to offering additional opportunities to help people improve their lives. Our plan includes doubling program offerings in the areas of health care, education and employment, while also increasing the hours that Our Place is open on the weekends.



As we move into the fall and winter seasons, we're conscious of the challenges facing our family members on the street. We're so thankful that in the days ahead, with your continued support, we'll have the resources to help people stay warm, fed and loved. Your contributions really do matter and without you we couldn't continue to grow and reach even more people in need.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Don Evans'.

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 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

Ministry of Health Art Exhibition

In **May** the Our Place Art Group participated in the Ministry of Health's Gallery 5 annual spring-summer art exhibition and fundraiser. Over 80 works were on display including works from other local artists. Several family members' artwork, inspired by wildlife and First Nations culture, has been sold, with proceeds going to the artists. Ticket sales raised \$320 to purchase supplies for the Our Place Art Group.

Garden Project

During the month of **June**, Our Place staff, family members and volunteers came together for the annual re-planting of Victoria City Hall's Small Steps Edible Garden in Centennial Square. Family member and former transitional housing resident, Sheldon [pictured in the photo below] was instrumental in launching the partnership with the City. Sheldon tends the garden and harvests its vegetables and herbs for use in the soup served at Our Place.

Take me out to the ball game!

Our Place took full advantage of the sun-drenched **summer** days, hosting our annual series of baseball games and BBQs, a total of four at Heywood Field at Beacon Hill Park. This casual, fun-filled annual community event is now in its seventh year.

Splish Splash Charity Car Wash

On **September** 7th Our Place joined forces with MPs, MLAs, mayors, city councillors in nine jurisdictions, police officers, firefighters, media personalities, community leaders and volunteers, in an effort to help end hunger in our city. "The issue of hunger does not see municipal boundaries, so I am very pleased that colleagues from other municipalities came out to assist us in the washing of cars!" says Charlayne Thornton-Joe, City of Victoria councillor and event organizer. Almost \$1,800 was raised for Our Place and 20 tours of the facilities were conducted.

To find out more about events, visit ourplacesociety.com and click on *Upcoming Events*.



Photos LEFT TO RIGHT Outreach worker Dakota and family member Sheldon plant seeds in the garden in Centennial Square. Family member William pitches to the batter up during a recent ball game. At the Splish Splash Car Wash, Victoria Royal's mascot Marty the Marmot poses with Bob Frank, Our Place Facilities Manager.

Our Family

Don's Story

"It's like a game of snakes and ladders," says long-time Victoria resident, Don McLeod, about injuries due to a recent bicycle accident that he's concerned will impede his recovery.

In the past, an injury like this one would have sent the retired commercial fisherman and businessman back to using heroin and prescription pain killers. But this time around there's a big difference in how Don's navigating life's ups and downs.

"We didn't talk about our personal problems in my family," says Don who has been living in Our Place's transitional housing since 2012. "If you had a problem, you kept it to yourself. When my mother had cancer, she didn't tell us. It wasn't until she started going for chemo that we noticed something was wrong."

Don has learned that keeping his problems to himself was, in fact, a problem. Now he's eager to ask for help and to act on it. "Don's been a pleasure to work with," says Outreach Worker Dorothea. "He's proactive about his own health and wellness. He's eating up what Our Place has to offer him."

Don's health challenges began at age 10 when he was introduced to pain medication for an allergic-type reaction, while living in Los Angeles. "All my synovial fluids seized up. The doctors said nothing was draining. My head looked like a basketball,

and the headaches were severe. I could barely see out of my eyes because my face was so swollen," says Don.

When his sinuses finally drained, Don felt "blessed relief." But before relief came, he had been administered morphine for an entire month during his stay in the Beverly Hills Children's Hospital. "I would just scream, and they would hit me up with morphine," says Don. "I had to be weaned off of it."

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In 1965, Don's family moved to Victoria. By age 17, Don was bussing tables at a local bar. Although he wasn't allowed to bus bottles at that age, he was invited to after-hour parties where booze and drugs, including heroin, were readily available.

"I was making a lot of money in the bar for a kid my age. Everything was easy for me to get. I started supplying kids at my school. I opened a door I shouldn't have," says Don who continued in the bar business, working as a bouncer, and then later, as a bartender.

Don suffered a back injury from his work as a bouncer. By age 19, he was popping prescription pain killers like they were candy. Then he discovered heroin – it was



LEAVE A LEGACY

BECOME AN ANGEL OF HOPE TODAY

Stories like Don's are happening all around us at Our Place. Imagine knowing that your compassion will make a lasting difference in the lives of hurting people after you're gone. Plan now to donate a portion of your estate for those who need it most. By contributing a LEAVE A LEGACY™ gift you become an Angel of Hope for years to come. For more information call Don Evans, Executive Director at 250-388-7112 ext. 239.



the in-thing to do among his peers, and found it provided better pain relief. An opportunity arose to work as a deckhand on a commercial fishing boat. The time spent on the ocean, away from his familiar haunts, enabled Don to wean himself off heroin. His freedom from addiction, however, was short-lived. During the fishing season, Don didn't use heroin, but, whenever he returned home, he "got sucked back into it."

As the years went by, Don helped to open bars and continued to enjoy Victoria's night life. But his conscience bothered him. He saw friends die from drug-related causes and thought, "What I'm doing (dealing heroine) is killing people." But when his friends hurt from not getting a fix, he wanted to help them.

After injuries from a serious car accident in 1995 ended his commercial fishing career, Don gradually "downsized" from

living in a penthouse, to living in a one-bedroom apartment, to couch surfing, and finally, to sleeping on a park bench. "I fell into using more. My family found out about my life-long, on-again off-again habit." But his family didn't pressure him; his sister knew Don had to do it his own way.

When the temptation to slide back into addiction and isolation arises, it can make a world of difference to know support is close at hand.

Don tried AA but it wasn't a fit for him. He considered entering a drug treatment center but its doors closed. He spoke to his doctor who, upon hearing of his addiction, refused to continue treating Don. He confided in a long-time friend only to hear: "So you're a junkie. Don't ever call me again."

Living on the street became unbearable. Don was robbed. More friends died. His maxim had been, "Never let them know you're down." Finally he had hit rock bottom.

Don came to Our Place looking for a way out of his addiction and homelessness. He's found more than just shelter. He's found a supportive community. And he's giving back. "If someone needs help, Don helps out," says Dorothea. Don also tends the resident gardens.

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"I'm really glad I'm here," says Don.

Our Place is excited to announce the new Psychotherapy Program offered in partnership with retired university professor and psychotherapist, Dr. Bill Cooke on Wednesdays and Fridays, 1 pm to 3 pm. The program's needs-based approach is built on Dr. Cooke's belief that each individual has a unique set of issues. Dr. Cooke welcomes people to the program who are ready to confront the reality of their situation and are looking for a manageable approach to dealing with their issues.

PSYCHOTHERAPY PROGRAM

NEW AT OUR PLACE!



Our Programs

Food Services

It's 4 a.m. and most Victoria residents are sleeping, but not family member Patrice.

Patrice is in the Our Place dining room prepping for the day's most important meal, breakfast. Patrice is one of the more than 200 people every month that make it possible for Our Place to serve over 1,200 meals daily.

Brian Cox, Food Services Manager at Our Place says, "We offer the city's most reliable and consistent meal service for people in need." Our Place not only strives to provide the most nutritious free meals possible, but also takes steps to ensure that people are treated with respect, that line-ups and 'cannot's' are kept to a minimum. Brian says, "Family members have heard a lot of 'No, you can't do that!' or 'No, you don't qualify for this!' We try to provide some food options, while ensuring that the service is as streamlined and as friendly as possible." The nutrition bar operated out of the Drop-In Centre is open outside of regularly scheduled meal times.

Brian says that kitchen staff members typically don't have a "gold star" restaurant background. "We look for people with life experience who have worked with vulnerable populations. Cooking skills can

be learned. Having the right attitude is what really matters." For some family members, volunteering in the kitchen has been an essential part of their recovery process. Members have also been hired on as staff. The supervision of the ten kitchen staff and 200 volunteers requires constant synchronized communication.

"There are so many things to feel proud of," says Brian of the people, businesses and organizations contributing to the meal program. Collaboration with like-minded groups, such as the Mustard Seed and the Rainbow Kitchen project, has resulted in sharing supplies when needs arise. Menu planning has to be flexible and creative to make effective use of unexpected donations.

Recent developments in the program include a vegetarian meal option that features fresh produce donated by local farms, grocers and backyard gardeners. The Garden Project (see page 3) supplies fresh vegetables, and the Grow-A-Row program, in partnership with LifeCycles encourages gardeners to donate fruits and vegetables from their harvest.

"I really appreciate the vegetarian plate. When it's offered I don't have to go without a meal. It makes a big difference," says family member Robyn.

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE LIFE-BLOOD OF OUR ORGANIZATION.

BECOME PART OF A DYNAMIC TEAM OF COMPASSIONATE PEOPLE assisting Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. Register today for a volunteer orientation on one of the following Thursdays: OCT 3, 17 & 31 | NOV 21 | DEC 5 & 19 | JAN 2, 16 & 30. Sessions run from 10 am to Noon. Please call Rodrigo at 250-388-7112 ext. 243 or email: volunteer@ourplacesociety.com.



Our Volunteers

For the past 10 years, retired UVic music professor, Bruce More has carried on the family tradition of community service.

Adjacent to the Our Place library that Bruce helped to create, Bruce's father, United Church minister Bill More, and mother, Elsie More are commemorated in a stained-glass window (above) aptly-named "Songs & Stories."

Bruce was inspired to create and curate the Our Place library because of the pleasure he found in the stories he'd been reading for decades. "Family members love the paperback novels donated to the library. It gives them an opportunity to relax and escape from the vicissitudes of life. The appreciation expressed to me has exceeded my expectations."

Bruce says volunteering at Our Place not only eased his transition into retirement, it also provided him with the feeling of being part of a family that he's proud of. "It's personally satisfying to be part of this organization," says Bruce. In addition to his library responsibilities, Bruce gets behind the wheel of the Our Place truck weekly

to pick up and deliver donations from local farms, grocers, clothing retailers and other supporters. Ten years ago Bruce started serving doughnuts and coffee as an Upper Room volunteer, and he's still going strong. His parents would be proud! And so are we.

Our New Initiative

Our Place is turning heads when it comes to its waste reduction strategy.

Upon the recommendation of the Capital Regional District, Facilities Manager Bob Frank made a presentation to the B.C. Housing regional shelters meeting outlining our successful waste management practices.

Bob sums up what's driving our success in one word: collaboration. Bob reached out to Waste Management for help with implementing best practices at Our Place. Once the education of kitchen, facilities and custodial staff was underway, the collaboration broadened in a way that Bob wasn't expecting: "What really surprised me was the strong willingness to reduce waste shown by everyone. Family members, volunteers and staff were all eager to participate." Our Place has diverted 100% of its kitchen waste from the landfill.



Things We Need

**WARM JACKETS
BLANKETS
SLEEPING BAGS
DRY GOODS
FRUITS
VEGETABLES
TOILETRIES**

WINTER IS COMING! 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.**



Photos LEFT TO RIGHT Volunteer Bruce More drives the Our Place truck to pick up goods from all over Greater Victoria. Kitchen scraps from plates are deposited into Organics Only buckets in the dining room. Building Maintenance worker Donny dumps one of the buckets into the outdoor bin designated for composting.

Fundraising Events

All proceeds benefit Our Place Society. Please visit ourplacesociety.com for more information.

The Victoria Masquerade Ball

Saturday, October 26, 2013
Fairmont Empress Hotel
TICKETS \$130 at victoriaball.com.

Come celebrate with us and enjoy the red carpet reveal, performances by the Victoria Ballet and live music by The Midnights.

Duke Ellington's Sacred Music Concert

Saturday, November 16, 2013
University of Victoria
Farquhar Auditorium
TICKETS \$35/\$45/\$75 at tickets.uvic.ca.

Enjoy the sacred, critically-acclaimed music of Duke Ellington featuring Dee Daniels, the Fred Stride Orchestra, Marcus Mosely, Louise Rose, Alex Dugdale, and the Sacred Music Gospel Choir.

CBC Presents Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol

Wednesday, December 11, 2013
Victoria Conservatory of Music
Alix Goolden Hall
TICKETS \$15 at eventbrite.com.

In person at Ditch Records, 784 Fort Street, 250-386-5874, and Lyles Place, 770 Yates Street, 250-382-8422.

Enjoy this traditional tale read by your favourite CBC personalities. Music by Our Place's own Open Door Choir and The Victoria Good News Choir with Louise Rose.

Creative Ways to Give

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 300 people. Options include:

pancakes, sausages and coffee for \$375, or scrambled eggs, ham, potatoes and coffee for \$450. Lunches and dinners can also be sponsored.



Monthly Donor Program

Monthly donors are the heartbeat of hope and belonging at our Place. We love knowing we can count on our friends of the family throughout the year. Donations are automatically withdrawn each month, ensuring ease and consistency. All contributions are gratefully received, with no minimum amount required.

Donate your Shoppers Drug Mart Optimum Points

Our Place can purchase toiletries and first-aid supplies with your Shoppers Optimum points. Click the "Donate" button on our website and choose "Other Ways To Give," then follow the links.

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

Our Place Community Meals

Over 1,000 people will celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas at Our Place with a traditional turkey dinner and all the trimmings, served by local politicians and volunteers.

Community Thanksgiving Meal

Thursday, October 10, 2013
11 am - 2 pm

Community Christmas Meal

Thursday, December 19, 2013
11 am - 2 pm

Win a Return Trip for Two

Anywhere WestJet Flies!

Draw will take place at the Duke Ellington's Sacred Music Concert, November 16, 2013. Tickets \$20 each or 3 for \$50. Includes all air travel fees, taxes and surcharges. All proceeds will support Our Place Society programs. WestJet Vacations and charters are exempt. Flights must be taken by November 16, 2014. BC Gaming license # 56837.

For tickets, visit our website at ourplacesociety.com or contact Tracy at 250-388-7112 ext. 259.



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