



## NEWSLETTER Winter2012

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## From the Board Chair...

by Shannon Renault, Board Chair

There is always time for celebrating the hope that a new year will bring and saying thanks for the successes of a previous year. This past year your commitment to Our Place allowed us to bring a sense of belonging to Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. We are grateful for all the meals, volunteer hours, financial donations, clothing donations and so much more.

With your help in the past year, we served over 400,000 meals to those who needed it most. During the holiday season, we provided 925 Angel Gifts to people living in poverty in Greater Victoria, making their Christmas season more meaningful. We have been able to offer transitional housing to over 45 people and have helped 114 people into life-changing detox and treatment programs. If someone is struggling to locate a bed for the night, a warm meal or more personal support finding specific services, Our Place Society is here for our vulnerable friends in Greater Victoria.

At Our Place, we encourage a sense of belonging within our family, and wish to extend that to you. We invite you to tour our facility and learn more about how your gifts help each individual who walks through the doors. After a year of much change, we look forward to increasing opportunities in the lives of those we serve.

On behalf of the Board and staff, please accept our gratitude and best wishes in 2012, and we look forward to your continued support.

## Your Help Makes a Difference.

**You made Christmas come true.**

Thanks to you, Our Place Society filled the hearts of many with joy this Christmas. Through nourishing food, warm winter clothes and gift cards for Thrifty Foods, we spread holiday cheer to those who needed extra help this festive season.

With the help of over 250 volunteers, staff and donors like you, we put on a spread of turkey, stuffing, vegetables, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie for over 1,200 people. With the help of the United Church, we distributed 925 Angel gifts of warm clothing and gifts. Through our community partner grocery store Thrifty Foods, we gave away gift cards to those in need.

It was a wonderful season of giving, and we appreciate everything you have done to help the most vulnerable our community. Thank you.

## Why do you donate?

I am a senior living on a fixed income but as I live in the neighborhood, I do what I can to give to Our Place as I feel you are helping the homeless and helpless and Victoria needs more places like yours.

**-Jean**

Our Place Society does amazing and selfless work. It is important for us to remember that people living on the streets are all someone's child. We need to help those who may not have the same luck and support that we do.

**-Henry**

I give to Our Place because it is vitally important to the community and we luckier people must make sure that it continues to exist.

**-Jenny**



## Family Focus:

### Shirley

If you step into the Our Place Society building during the weekdays, you will probably see Shirley's smiling face. Here from 6:30 am until 2:30 pm everyday, Shirley is part of a small but fiercely dedicated crew that maintains the cleanliness and beauty of the Our Place facility. Shirley has been here over a year still greets virtually everyone with a smile and a cheerful hello. After sitting down with her, I realized what an unbelievable life she has had and how much strength it has taken for her to end up here, healthy and clean.

Shirley is from the Pacheedaht Band and grew up in Port Alberni. With four brothers and an abusive mother, Shirley lived through the loss of family members, lived on the street, struggled with drug and alcohol addiction, had numerous attempts at treatment and a lot of self degradation.

Shirley recounts to me her first encounter with alcohol and drunkenness, at the age of eleven while living with her abusive mother. She had stolen beer from her mother's boyfriend so she could get drunk in the bushes with her friends. This was the start of a long struggle with alcohol addiction. While Shirley used drugs throughout her life as well, she now recognizes booze as her biggest weakness.

While she lived with her mother for her childhood, she does not retain any happy memories with her. "I remember being ten years old and feeling like, 'why doesn't my mother just kill me, I'm pretty much dead after she beats

me,'" Shirley says while describing how she had virtually no support growing up, "Why doesn't she just get it over with and kill us all, because she doesn't want us."

After running away from home at fifteen years old, Shirley's life continued to spiral downward. Over the next few years, she was drinking constantly, and using drugs often. To survive, she learned to go to men to get what she wanted, whether it was drugs or just a place to stay for the night.

Having tried treatment numerous times, one year ago, she decided to give it one last shot, with the encouragement of her partner who had supported her through the last few years of her addiction. "I almost turned back when I was heading to the treatment centre. When I eventually got there, I was already coming down. I was seeing things and thought I was hearing things. I was just a disaster and of course, I'm going into anxiety big time, I'm thinking my veins are popping. "

Treatment took awhile. Shirley admits that she was angry. She blamed other people for what had happened to her. But over time, she began to absorb what the counselors were saying, forgive herself and others in her life and begin to move on to a new phase. The trauma and loss in her life has been enormous. "My broken marriage, my dad who died of alcoholism. One brother died from a drug overdose and another brother died of AIDS. My other two brothers have died as well, of accidental deaths." Shirley thought she had nothing to live for, but once she allowed herself to be integrated into the treatment, she realized she had a lot, "I have my children and my grandchildren and my family is growing."

Returning to Victoria after her stay at the treatment centre on the mainland, Shirley applied for a job at Our Place Society. "I didn't think I was going to get hired because of my past. But Bob the Our Place Manager of Facilities gave me a chance and he says he's glad he did." She attributes the second chance to the grace of God, but if you have met Shirley, you know it's also a matter of her overwhelming inner strength, positive energy and generous personality.

About six months after she became sober, disaster struck. Shirley suffered the loss of her youngest grandson- a five month old boy – to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. When she was able to come through that tragedy and stay clean and supportive to her family, Shirley knew she could make it through anything.

Shirley has found a place in her life. She lives with her partner who stayed with her through all her struggles, she cares for her grandchildren and is doing everything she can to help them stay out of what she went through. And she has a community here at Our Place Society. "I am giving back here at Our Place. I am looking after people and telling them my story. People will ask me how I work here and go home and not drink or use drugs anymore and I say, it's because I work by my higher power. I believe in my higher power."

## Education

At Our Place Society, we aim to help people in their everyday life, as well as with long term changes. By offering educational courses and groups, we are committed to helping our family members learn and expand their technical and artistic skills within a safe community.

Our Camosun College Computer Class is aimed at providing and improving on basic computer skills in a flexible format. Students work at their own pace and are encouraged to build specific skills for improving their chances at employment.

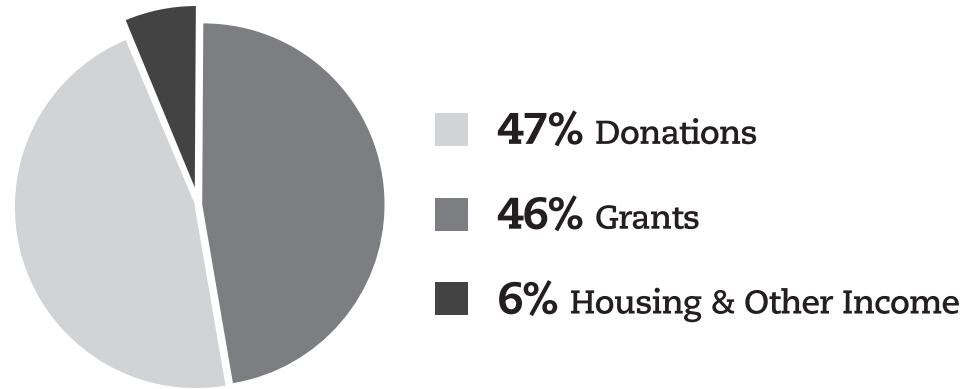
Once a week, the chapel at Our Place Society becomes a centre of inspiration, where volunteers encourage our family members to express themselves through art and creative writing. People are also welcomed to join the choir, which meets once per week and is run on a volunteer

basis by Victoria musician, Louise Rose. Both of these activities help inspire our family members to explore their creativity and express themselves.

# Year in Review

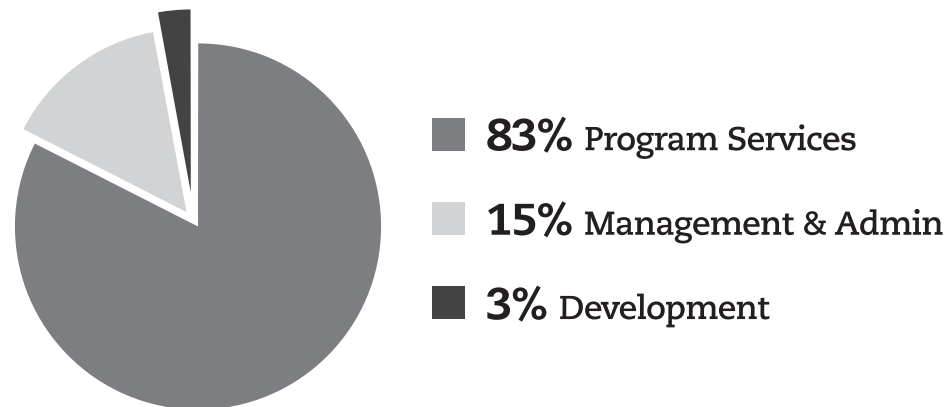
## Total Support

Thousands joined us in helping Greater Victoria's most vulnerable. Here's the breakdown of where our total support came from in 2011:




## Contributions in Action

We've worked diligently to be efficient. Here's the breakdown of how we used donor dollars to support our mission:



Here's a snapshot of what donors like you made happen last year:

 **414,277** meals served

 **8,978** showers

 **137** employment referrals

 **146** detox and treatment referrals

 **140** people have been accommodated in our transitional housing

 **18** family members enrolled in a computer class offered by Camosun College at OPS

## Volunteering with Our Place

Our Place volunteers are of service to our family in diverse ways. Volunteers provide assistance in our program areas, are members of our board of directors, help out at special events and take on special assignments that make the best use of their talents and experience. Through offering your time and talents in service to our family, it is our hope and expectation that you will enjoy the laughter, humour and sharing that happens between volunteers, employees and family members each and every day.

Volunteers are an essential part of keeping Our Place and its many programs and services running smoothly. We could not open our doors each and every day without the support and assistance of

our valued volunteers. In return, our commitment is to offer volunteers a positive, fulfilling and enjoyable volunteer experience. Our program managers and employees are committed to providing volunteers with the ongoing support, orientation, feedback and training they will require to perform their roles efficiently and effectively.

We thank our volunteers for giving so very generously of their time and for being of service to our family. Please contact Antoinette at [antoinette@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:antoinette@ourplacesociety.com) if you would like to become involved.

## Program Focus:

### Foot Hygiene

In our damp climate, living on the street can take a serious toll on people's feet. The hygiene area in Our Place Society is specially designed to accommodate our unique foot hygiene program. Every week, nursing practicum students from UVIC come down to Pandora Avenue and donate their time to care for the feet of those who need it the most.

Says a long-time volunteer in our clothing room, "The foot hygiene program is so essential-I have never seen people light up the way they do when they are being cared for, pampered and looked after by the nurses- it is good for their body and their soul."

If you are interested in learning more about this program, or any others that we offer, please do not hesitate to contact our front desk.

# Sharing the Warmth



Over the past five years, Our Place Society and Thrifty Foods have led an extremely successful initiative called Help End Hunger. Through this program, the support of Thrifty Foods and so many generous donors, we were able to supply one quarter of our annual food budget!

In addition to food, Our Place Society has a great need for clothing and other personal items. With the success of Help End Hunger, it only made sense to continue our community partnerships. Both Marks Work Wearhouse and Capital Iron have signed on for our Share the Warmth program. With the option to purchase coupons at the till, Share the Warmth mimics the model of Help End Hunger, donating 100% of the coupon proceeds directly to Our Place Society. So, while you are out in Victoria shopping, consider stopping at one of these three stores to help change lives!

## 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