

# Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2016

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

## Executive Director's Message

**If the last year is any indication, 2016 is going to be a busy time of change and transformation.**

There has been a lot of attention in the public consciousness this winter about the need for affordable housing. The spotlight is certainly warranted as so many vulnerable people have grown tired of being ignored and left to live in tents and doorways.

At Our Place, we are responding by opening our facility at 6:30 a.m., allowing access to hot food, dry clothing and clean, warm showers. This winter, however, we felt it was important to do even more.

To that end, we opened a new winter shelter at First Metropolitan United Church that opens at 7:30 p.m. and runs seven nights a week. The shelter opened with 40 mats that were available to individuals, couples and people with pets.

Almost immediately upon opening, the shelter was filled. After the first month, we secured additional funding to expand the shelter to 50 mats.

What's truly incredible about this shelter is the community that is being built there. When people don't have to expend all their energy wondering where they will lay their heads at night or where to store their belongings, they can begin to focus on positive change.

Our Place's Outreach team works with the shelter occupants to help make those first



connections toward a brighter future.

And we plan to do more.

At the time I write this, Our Place is working with our community partners on opening a temporary, 24/7 shelter that is intended to be a stepping stone to permanent housing for those who need it most.

We are also gearing up for the next step of our employment program. Our goal is to bring in expertise that will help people gain pre-employment skills, training and ultimately employment, plus the support needed to stay employed.

It's a big task, but we believe it is possible.

Thank You for your continued support,

Don Evans  
Executive Director



## THANK 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

## Big Latke Lunch

To celebrate Hanukkah – the Jewish Festival of Lights – eager and excited volunteers of the Congregation Emanu-El took over the kitchen at Our Place on Dec. 19 for The Big Latke Lunch.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to share our festival and bring a little bit of light to the family members at Our Place," said Rabbi Harry Brechner.

Congregation Emanu-El is the oldest surviving synagogue in Canada.

## Angel Gifts

For the last three years, Our Place volunteer Linda Ryder has dedicated her Christmas to collecting as many presents as possible.

But before you get jealous, she gives all of them away to vulnerable people who might otherwise go without.

Ryder runs Angel Gifts, a program that has been in existence for 13 years with co-ordination passed from hand to hand. Through the generosity of her fellow Our Place volunteers, local churches, schools, community groups and government offices, Ryder helped hand out over 750 personalized presents to people living in poverty on Dec. 16.

"It means so much to people to receive a gift that is meant just for them," says Ryder. "I get so many hugs that I can't stop smiling."

Each gift has an approximate value of \$40, and "angels" are encouraged to add a personal message to the recipient.

"It's truly wonderful to witness the community coming together like this and spread the true meaning of Christmas," says Don Evans, executive director of Our Place. "Each gift is greeted with a smile of

appreciation, and the occasional giggle, which warms all our hearts."

## Christmas Carol

A wonderful time was had by all at Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* presented by CBC and Our Place.

The Alix Goolden Hall was filled with song from the Open Door Choir @ Our Place as Dickens' masterpiece was read by CBC personalities Madeline Green, Michael Tymchuk, Bob McDonald, Gregor Craigie, Megan Thomas and Arthur Black.



**VOICES RAISED IN HARMONY:** We were blessed this Christmas to have many wonderful choirs share the spirit of the season in our dining room during lunch hour. The City of Gardens Chorus - Sweet Adelines International was just one of over a dozen talented school, church and community groups who dropped by to lift our spirits with the beauty of their voices.



# Our Family

## Kari's Story

**Many of us face obstacles in our daily lives that challenge even the toughest individuals, but for Kari that very first obstacle nearly killed her. She was barely two months old.**

**N**ewborn and vulnerable, Kari was diagnosed with brain cancer that caused tumours to grow inside her tiny skull.

Surgeons were able to operate and save her life, but the damage severely affected her ability to retain memories.

It also made it impossible to learn.

Growing up, she floundered in school. Unable to read or write, Kari stumbled over obstacle after obstacle.

Her family life was never stable, and after being sexually assaulted at the age of 15 by a 40-year-old man, she ran away to live on the streets.

Her first stop was East Hastings in Vancouver, where at the age of 17, she was sexually assaulted again.

"I have gaps," she says. "Parts of my life are blank."

Life on the streets was difficult, and Kari soon found herself battling drug addiction.

"I was using everything," she says. "It was just what you did to stop the pain."

And yet the obstacles kept coming.

Without any stability in her life, she ended up in an unhealthy marriage. And although the union produced a baby daughter, along with her son from a previous relationship, the marriage soon collapsed.

Then, on a trip to the U.S., she fell on broken glass and had to be rushed to hospital for an operation on her knee.

During the operation, Kari was given a blood transfusion. The blood, however, was tainted with HIV, a virus that attacks the immune system. Since then, she's discovered that she also has Hepatitis C, an infectious disease affecting primarily the liver.

"I was told that I had ten years to live," she says. "But I'm still here."

That was 14 years ago.

The following years are a shambles of moving from low-rent housing to bouts of homelessness and back to low-rent housing.

## LEGACY OF LOVE

A PLANNED GIFT  
CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

JOIN THE OVER 150 SUPPORTERS of Our Place who have become part of our **Legacy of Love** program and confirmed they have included Our Place in their legacy planning. Leaving a gift in your will for Our Place will ensure that those experiencing poverty will always have a welcoming and supportive environment with vital services and programs at our downtown location. You are truly helping to transform lives. **If you are interested in learning more about leaving a Legacy of Love with Our Place, please call us at 250-413-3161 or email [legacy@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:legacy@ourplacesociety.com)**

“ Kari is a bright addition to the resident community and so much fun to work with. She has a great sense of humour. ”

— Natalie,  
Housing Support Worker



## “Our Place’s transitional housing program keeps you clean, it keeps you stable.”

Kari ended up homeless again at the age of 38 when her one-bedroom apartment was invaded by bed bugs.

Five months ago, however, she secured a spot in Our Place’s transitional housing program.

The top three floors of Our Place’s building on Pandora contain 45 units of transitional housing for the hardest to house. There, residential housing support workers, along with a mental health and addictions clinician, work one-on-one with residents.

“There are a lot of rules,” says Kari with

a small smile. “But it keeps you clean, it keeps you stable — and there are no bed bugs.”

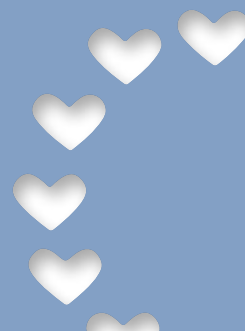
Working with Natalie, her housing support worker, Kari is learning how to set goals for her future. Part of that future includes helping out in the community.

While Kari has done some volunteer work at Our Place, she enjoys working with AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI) where she hands out harm-reduction supplies.

AVI also offers support services for people living with HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C, which Kari participates in.

Moving forward, Kari is currently in a new relationship that she feels happy about.

Learning a lesson from her past, however, she isn’t rushing into things. If it continues on a positive path, she hopes that one day soon she will be able to return to permanent housing.



**THERE ARE GREAT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES** in our Donation Processing department, including volunteer drivers. Become part of a dynamic team of compassionate people assisting Victoria’s most vulnerable citizens. To find out when the next volunteer orientation session is being held, call our **Manager of Volunteers** at 250-388-7112 Ext. 243 or email [volunteer@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:volunteer@ourplacesociety.com).

## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE  
AN INTEGRAL PART OF WHAT WE DO



# Our Programs

## Reiki



**Jackie is wrapped in a warm blanket when Karen gently clasps her hands around Jackie's feet. "I can feel energy traveling up my entire body," Jackie says. "Like a weight being lifted."**

The confession brings a smile to Karen's face. She has heard it before — many times — but each experience means something different to every person she treats.

For Jackie, it's Karen's palpable kindness as much as her life-long skill that brings her back each Friday for a Reiki treatment in Our Place's hygiene area.

Reiki is a healing technique based on the principle that the therapist can channel energy into the patient by means of touch, to activate the natural healing processes of the patient's body and restore physical and emotional well-being.

Karen has been "laying hands" on people since she was a child, but it was a life-changing motorbike accident that led her to formalize her training and become a Reiki practitioner.

In 2011, the accident left Karen in an ocean of pain, and suffering a head injury. As a former dancer and martial arts expert, the injuries made her frustrated as her body and brain didn't respond the way she wanted them to.

"I had to think about everything I did before I did it," she says. "Even brushing my teeth wasn't automatic. I had to make a plan."

Musical therapy was key to regaining her life. At her father's funeral in 2006, Karen's family sang "Somewhere Over The Rainbow". The song came to mean so much to her that she had the musical score tattooed over her entire body.

"It made me feel safe," she says. "It made me whole again."

One year ago, Karen arrived at Our Place to volunteer her healing services with weekly Reiki sessions, and the family has embraced her wholeheartedly. In fact, she can't walk too far without people rushing up and wanting one of her great hugs.

"It's an amazing experience," she says. "I wanted to give back what has been given to me, but I've received so much more."



## NEW PROGRAMS

### COMPUTERS AND LITERACY

**CAMOSUN COLLEGE BRINGS SCHOOL HOME:** Our Place has long had a great relationship with Camosun College as the school has helped deliver such important classes as Math Basics and Computer Basics 1. This year, Camosun is excited to expand its offerings with Computer Basics 2 and English Basics with a strong focus on reading and writing. Enhancing this latter program is a team-up with Literacy Victoria, which is providing tutors to work one-on-one with our family members on the joys of reading.





The Breakfast Club is all smiles in the Our Place kitchen

## Our Donors

**When Neil Bosdet arrived at Our Place to serve a breakfast as part of Realtor Month, he didn't realize how much it would affect him.**

"It really touched me," he says. "I thought it was such a great thing, putting food in people's bellies, and so affordable."

Inspired by the idea, Neil brought 11 other Royal LePage realtors onboard to form **The Breakfast Club**.

Each realtor donated \$500 to sponsor a cooked breakfast, and the group arrives once a month to serve 300 or more hungry people.

"We like to do it on the Friday before welfare cheque day," says Bosdet. "Everyone really appreciates it."

The response from diners and servers alike has been so great that The Breakfast Club is already organized to continue the tradition in 2016.

"We'll be here," says Bosdet. "It's a highlight of every month."

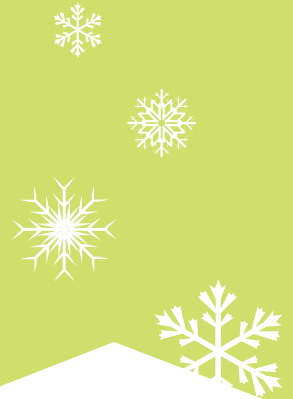
Realtor Month is also returning for a month of sponsored breakfasts in January.

**SHIRLEY SUPERSTAR:** We just love this photo of Shirley, our incredibly hardworking custodian and inspiration to so many of our family members. Recently, Shirley celebrated five years of sobriety. Our unofficial ambassador of strength and transformation, Shirley keeps busy working at Our Place and looking after her granddaughters.

## Our Volunteers

‘ Even on my most busy days, when I'm totally exhausted, I have to say that my afternoon shift at Our Place Society completely and utterly fills me up. The people that I work with that literally come with practically nothing in the form of material possessions, and many without even a place to sleep at night, are quite frankly the most grateful and giving and loving people on this planet. ’

— Volunteer Mary Davies



## Things We Need

**UNDERWEAR  
SOCKS  
WARM JACKETS  
BLANKETS  
SLEEPING BAGS  
DRY GOODS  
FRUIT  
TOILETRIES**

WINTER IS HERE! 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 also greatly appreciated.

**Contact Tracy at  
250-388-7112 ext. 259.**



## Creative Ways to Give



**LEO'S BEAUTIFUL HEART:** We are blessed in our community to have so many kind and compassionate donors, but sometimes a particular gift grabs your heart. Leo is 5 years old. He approached his Mom this year and said instead of getting gifts for his birthday, he wanted to collect donations and give to Our Place. And so he did. Thank you, Leo.

### 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 300 family members. Our talented kitchen staff prepares a nutritious, cooked breakfast. A \$500 fee covers the cost of the food, and we encourage an extra donation to help fund operations.



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

### Giving Tuesday

While Black Friday has become the epitome of shopping madness, Giving Tuesday is a relatively new concept that is inspiring others to give back to those who are less fortunate.

"Our regular supporters understand what important work we do," says Don Evans, executive director of Our Place. "Giving Tuesday allowed others in the community to get involved."

Local philanthropist Andrew Beckerman loves the idea of giving back, and this year he challenged Victorians to make this the best Giving Tuesday ever with an initial donation of \$2,000.

The one-day social media event ended up raising over \$18,000.

## Our Place Recent Stats

January - December, 2015

Meals Served

**526,664**



Volunteer Hours

**38,277**



Showers in Hygiene

**12,878**



Crisis Interventions

**824**



Programs Offered

**62**



## Your Help is Needed this Winter

This past summer and fall saw an unexpected increase in the number of vulnerable people seeking solace, food and shelter at Our Place. Moving into winter, we saw the need once again to open our doors for longer periods into the evening, and we desperately need your help to keep people warm, safe and fed during the cold, wet months ahead. If you can help with a donation, please call:

**250-413-3161**



**ourplace**

**Hope and Belonging**

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