



Change is happening on Pandora

By Julian Daly, Our Place CEO

If you've travelled down Pandora recently, you will have noticed a lot of change.

The most visible changes are the fences being erected along the boulevards to allow the grass to regrow and to signal to people that Pandora is no longer a suitable place for camping.

Change can be difficult, and it comes with a lot of opinions, challenges and controversy, but in this case, it also comes with a genuine feeling of hopefulness.

Every individual who has been struggling on Pandora has been approached and offered shelter. Most are embracing the idea as they understand that shelter is the first step to securing permanent, stable housing. Shelter is also the first step for people to be properly assessed.

Assessment means we can better understand exactly what supports are suited to each individual. For some that can simply be a bed out of the rain while they catch their breath and make a plan. For others, it's more complex: health needs, psychiatric support, medication renewals, dental care, supportive housing, detox, therapeutic recovery options, or even in some cases hospice.

At Our Place, we believe in dignity, and leaving people to struggle on our streets, back alleys and doorways is not dignified. Nor is it compassionate.

When we first launched our Pathways Off Pandora call for action, we knew it would take all of our partners – City of Victoria, Victoria Police, Bylaw, Island Health, BC Housing, and our fellow non-profits – to make it possible.

We threw down the gauntlet, and we were thrilled when our partners picked it up and asked how they could help.

You are starting to see the results of that teamwork now.

Naturally, it's a bit chaotic and a bit messy, but few things in life are ever perfect, especially where human beings are involved. We can't look at the people suffering outdoors on Pandora as a collective that will fit nicely into a one-solution-for-all box. Instead, we need to look at everyone on an individual basis because, and I feel this needs to be emphasized, **we want them to succeed.**

In short, we want to deliver hope.

So, yes, there are a lot of changes happening on Pandora, but this is just the beginning. Just because there is no one camping on Pandora doesn't mean our work is

done. There is still much to do. We are continuing to help those who have come inside from the streets as well as those who need our services just to make ends meet. We strive to help everyone along the path to a better, healthier life.

We don't want to repeat this cycle of street camping next winter or the winter after that. We want to put safeguards in place, build toward the future, and make it possible so that the moment anybody pitches a tent on our sidewalks, parks or alleyways that someone is there to take them to a shelter and begin the process of helping, healing, and housing.

Fences may say 'Keep Out,' but we want the ones on Pandora to say: 'We're here to help.'

And one day in the not-too-distant future, the grass will regrow, the fences will come down, and Pandora will become an example of what we can do when we work together with purpose, compassion and pure determination. It will no longer be a symbol of failure and despair but, instead, a symbol of success and transformation.

Personally, I can't wait.
Julian Daly
Our Place CEO



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Homeless to Housed: Dennis's Story

Meet local Victoria citizen, Dennis. He has asked not to have his photo or his last name used in telling his story in concern for the continued bias against people who have struggled as he has.

Dennis is a resident of Our Place's Albina Street supportive housing facility and just one example of someone on the journey from living on our streets to thriving in our community.



Dennis is a veteran of the Canadian military and served in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Between deployments, he returned home to find he was going to become a father. Having worked his way into a position of leadership in the military, he remembers the pain of making decisions to send his men into situations they often did not return from. Ultimately, he left service after being shot in the leg. It took 6 months to finish the surgeries he needed, and another 2 years to learn how to walk on it again.

Following his time in the military, Dennis worked in the logging industry. He operated specialized heavy equipment and enjoyed financial success and satisfaction for many years. Despite this, he continued to battle with the symptoms of PTSD and occasional pain from his injury.

He began using cocaine recreationally in the '80s and '90s and was able to pull himself away from it for a period when he became aware of the dangerous changes in the drug supply.

Without proper treatment, and with continued pain, however, he returned to drug use in the past few years as a last resort to cope. He quickly realized that his pain was only increasing and managed to get himself into treatment.

After three months of treatment, he returned to the apartment he shared with his then girlfriend to find that all his belongings had been sold or removed. He no longer had a place to live, any income, and was in a vulnerable place.

Having been aware of the homeless population in Victoria, and often taking time out of his day to lend a kind word and a listening ear to those he felt were grossly misunderstood, Dennis found himself camping alongside them in Irving Park.

"I never thought I would be homeless myself," he says.

Dennis felt an overwhelming sense of shame and burden. He refused to lean on his brother or his daughter for fear of hurting them. He would tell them he was out of town for work or find other reasons to avoid visits.

"It destroyed me," he says of his time on the street. "I was shivering and shaking and thinking, 'what am I doing here?'"

Dennis was homeless for 3 months before being referred to Our Place's transitional shelter by his contact in Veterans Affairs. There, he spent some time stabilizing until a spot opened up at Our Place's Albina Street housing.



Here, Dennis is thriving.

He has been living at Albina Street for almost a year and is known by staff and residents alike to go above and beyond to help others.

"I still have nightmares because of PTSD, and I can only sleep a couple hours a night, but I like this place because I can help out. The staff are awesome. I love them," he says about his time at Albina Street so far.

He can be found tidying up and making small repairs on any given day. He is also part of Albina Street's clean team, going out into the neighbourhood and picking up trash to better the community for everyone.

"I think, who do I know that's in trouble? And what can I do to help? Some people have come out and said 'we don't want you guys lurking around'...but other people bring me out cookies and coffee and I go out of my way to clean up even a little more."

In his free time, he's back to swimming and working out at a local community centre and he's on the board of a local club supporting other veterans. Perhaps most importantly, he's had a chance to finally reconnect with his daughter and granddaughters.

"I want them to be proud of their grandpa. I just became a great grandfather!" he says as he reflects on their visits to the local park together.

Dennis is currently looking for a permanent place of his own and hopes to be able to find a job helping out further in the community.

As more and more people are finally moving off our streets, there are hundreds of journeys like Dennis's that are just beginning. Will you make a donation today to ensure everyone can come to thrive like he has?





DOUBLE your donation & ensure everyone has a gift to open this year.

When you're shopping for the holidays this year, consider a gift to Our Place Society!

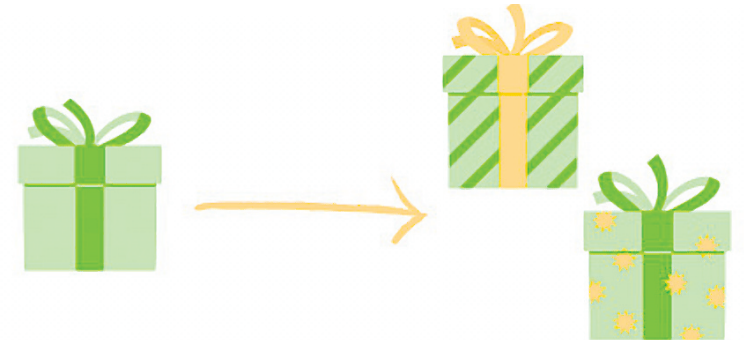
This Giving Tuesday, thanks to a group of generous Our Place supporters, donations received between November 1 and December 3 will make **TWICE** the impact for people who need it!

For the people in our community who rely on Our Place housing and shelters every day, the holidays can be a particularly hard time of year. For many, the gift you can provide may be the only gift they receive.

Your donations during this time will help ensure that everyone in Our Place housing and shelter facilities experiences a warm and joyful holiday season. Each person will receive a gift to open on Christmas morning, along with a hot meal and festive activities like caroling and building gingerbread houses.

“ The holidays can be really emotional for some of our residents, as a lot of them don't have families. It was so heartwarming to see the value even a simple connection can bring. It's really nice that we can all share these moments together.”

— Jasleen, Our Place
Housing Support Worker



No one deserves to feel alone during the holidays.

Your donation today makes sure that everyone in our region can experience a festive, nurturing celebration and know that their community cares about them.



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