

# Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2025

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Hope and Belonging

We thank Mail-O-Matic for donating resources to print this colour newsletter

## Message from Julian

**At the top of the year, I feel hopeful. Despite the challenges of 2024 for both our organization and those we serve, I believe this year will bring greater stability, strength, and opportunities for us to help people move toward a better place.**

Over the past 20 years, since the Open Door and the Upper Room joined forces to create Our Place in 2005, we have grown from a trusted centre providing meals and essential resources to a comprehensive community service provider. Today, we operate 6 supportive housing facilities with over 500 units of housing, a world-class addiction treatment centre, and a wide range of programs and professional services designed to meet the complex needs of every individual we serve.

The growth has been significant, but sadly reflects the growth in need over that time. We have stepped up to address and support folk to make a better life, whether that's getting into housing or getting out of addiction.

Homelessness, addiction, and poverty are not slowing down. But, neither is Our Place.

And in 2025, we'll take even bigger steps forward to strengthen and uplift this community by launching two new major initiatives:

**1. New Roads Women's Therapeutic Recovery Community:** this winter, a new long-term program is opening its doors. Women on Vancouver Island will finally have a place to begin their journey out of addiction.

**2. Your Place, a social enterprise:** Our Place is launching a community-focused enterprise to employ people coming off the streets and out of recovery in steady, gainful employment.

Thank you for being a part of this community and making the last 20 years so impactful for our region. What has been made possible, and these exciting next steps coming in 2025, are thanks to you.

With my gratitude,



**Julian Daly**  
Chief Executive Officer



## 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 many programs and services offered are only possible with the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters like you. Thank you!



# Hope & Belonging at Our Place



WINTER CARE (Clockwise): Angel Gifts was a huge success again this year; Jango the Recovery Dog at New Roads (credit: Ben Fenlon, Victoria News) Christmas lunch served by local media and government representatives; Warm Hearts Project delivers christmas packages to the men in recovery at New Roads; A Christmas Carol presented by Our Place and CBC; Food Services Manager, Brian Cox, with a generous donation of fresh produce from Farmlands Trust.

# Our Family

## Lee's Story

**“I decided it was time to return home and help people in my own community”**

**N**ew Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community is an essential part of Our Place's services. Under the leadership of Director, Cheryl Diebel, the facility has become a respected and trusted service provider for our region and helped hundreds to find a pathway out of addiction.

New Roads Manager, Lee Sundquist, joined the team 3 years ago. Her talent and compassion as a leader are an integral part of the community's success. But, her experience with addiction began far before she joined our team.

**“As a child, I didn't plan to grow up and be an addict. I had hopes and dreams like all my childhood friends,”** says Lee.

At 12 years old, Lee had her first drink. Drinking and smoking pot seemed to provide confidence where she felt she was missing it and dulled the pain of a difficult home life. Things progressed quickly and she was soon stealing liquor out of the cabinet with her friends and drinking before school.

“I got caught a few times. But, the principal knew I was abused at home. I would come to school with bruises and marks... they knew the signs. So, they didn't tell my parents and let me sleep it off in the sick room,” says Lee.

At just 15, Lee ran away from home with two friends dealing with a similar home situation. They rented a bachelor apartment together on Cook and Pandora. She reveled in her freedom, made new friends in the city, and experimented with new substances.

At 16, she injected heroin for the first time. “I will never forget it,” says Lee. “That was it for me.”

But, abusive relationships followed Lee into adulthood as her unhealthy upbringing led to an unhealthy marriage. She was married at 20, and 2 years later she welcomed her first daughter, Ashley.

**“During my pregnancy, I yearned to have a normal life and I stopped using”**.

But, shortly after Ashley was born, while continuing to bear the physical and mental abuse in her marriage, Lee returned to using substances.

After years of being stuck, Lee was able to get out of her marriage, but without support she wasn't able to break the patterns she had been fighting her whole life. At 27, her second daughter Alexis was born and she entered a second unhealthy marriage.

“Because drugs, alcohol, and abuse have always been a part of my life, it felt normal,” says Lee. “My life consisted of providing for my children and staying high.

## BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY BUILDERS PROGRAM TODAY

Why not join the many donors who have chosen to give monthly? This eco-friendly method ensures the money saved on printing and mailing goes directly to providing food and services for people in need. And, we'll send you one receipt for your annual donation in time for filing your tax return. Interested? Please call our philanthropy team at 250-940-5060 or choose 'monthly' when donating online at [www.ourplacesociety.com/donate](http://www.ourplacesociety.com/donate)



I did what I needed to do to provide and survive.”

Throughout her daughters’ childhoods, Lee would resort to whatever was necessary – including committing crimes and selling her body to provide essentials. When her children left home, she continued these behaviours, now to satisfy her deeply entrenched addiction. It was at this point that she was incarcerated for the first time. But, it wouldn’t be the last.

On January 30, 2013, Lee was in a familiar place – standing in front of a judge for crimes committed to support her addiction. This time, she was facing five years of jail time and forced relocation to Ontario. At the same time, she received an ultimatum from her daughter Ashley, now a mother herself, that she would no longer see her or her grandchildren if she didn’t make a change.

Standing in front of Judge Ernie Quantz, Lee was given one last chance. She took it.

Like all women on Vancouver Island right now, Lee had to make the hard decision to leave her community and her children behind to access treatment. Within 48 hours, she had to pack up her life and check

into a treatment facility in Maple Ridge. Her first few days were tumultuous. At one point she even tried to burn her bridges, insult the staff, and leave.

**“Addiction is a very selfish disease and I thought I knew it all.”**

But, when her daughter refused to pick her up, she sacrificed her ego and returned to the facility to complete her treatment. The relationships she built there would end up changing the trajectory of her life in ways she never imagined.

At the end of her treatment, she was offered a voluntary support worker training and they hired her immediately upon completion. She chose to stay on the mainland, where she had built her critical support system. Over the next 8 years, she worked her way up from junior support worker to assistant manager.

“At that point, I decided it was time to return home and help people in my own community,” says Lee.

The decision to move was fraught with conflict for Lee. Moving meant leaving her supports behind; the connections and community that recovery relies on. But, being back on the island also

meant reconnecting with her children and grandchildren.

Now serving as Manager of New Roads for 3 years, Lee has guided hundreds of men coming through the program.

“She inspired me from day one because of our shared experience with addiction, and now she is living proof recovery is possible. She is so passionate about the recovery life she is living, which gives all of us hope,” says Sean Woodford, a graduate of the program.

She was even able to reconnect with former board member of Our Place, and the same judge who set her on this new path, Ernie Quantz, to express her gratitude.

With New Roads soon to welcome a parallel women’s program, Lee will be stepping into the leadership role as Manager of the Women’s facility. Having navigated the challenges of finding treatment herself in our community, she is thrilled that women finally won’t have to choose between leaving their family and support systems on Vancouver Island, and getting well.

With her experience, Lee is ready and uniquely motivated to break the cycle of addiction for women here on the island, once and for all. We can’t think of anyone better suited.



The Government of Canada has announced that the deadline for 2024 charitable donations has been extended! Donations postmarked or made online before February 28th at midnight PST are eligible for a tax credit in 2024.

**WOMEN'S  
CENTRE**

HUNGRY HEARTS GALA

# Gratitude

## Birdhouse Project at New Roads

**The community is coming together to support some very unique neighbours in View Royal.**

BC Transit, New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Community, Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Bird Construction, RONA, and students at Eagle View Elementary have been working together for months to create new bird habitat for our feathered neighbours by building specially crafted birdhouses for a new Town of View Royal park on Watkiss Way.

When BC Transit started to plan for the new handyDART centre in View Royal next to New Roads, a neighbourhood working group was formed, including the Executive director of New Roads, Cheryl Diebel. The group was brought together to help shape the planning of the project, improve community connection and help identify community interests. Environmental sustainability was at the top of the list for all involved.



**COLOURFUL BIRDHOUSES FOR THE GALLOPING GOOSE**

HandyDART is a critical service for people with physical and cognitive disabilities and a new centre is needed to expand service to the growing region. The redevelopment of the site required realignment of the Galloping Goose trail, which meant some trees would need to be removed. With environmental sustainability being top of mind, it was important to everyone that the project found ways to ensure any trees removed were used beneficially on the site.

**“Sometimes we don’t think about how infrastructure projects like this can bring community together and advance other shared priorities,”**

–says Katie Hamilton, a community engagement consultant with Tavola Strategy Group and chair of the neighbourhood working group. “The neighbourhood working group members are experts in terms of what works in their neighbourhood, and their perspectives are invaluable to informing the project.”

BC Transit committed to recycling and reusing any tree removed in a way that would benefit the community. Some were used in a new protected riparian area, some were turned into wood chips for ground cover and stream access, and the final few trees were set aside for the new birdhouses.

Milling, wood planing, and construction of the birdhouses were beyond the scope and skillsets of the BC Transit team but within the community group, a perfect opportunity arose. Having learned more about New Roads through the neighbourhood working group, BC Transit approached Cheryl to see if there might be interest among the residents to build their woodworking skills to make the birdhouses happen.



## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS! We currently have a few select daytime and evening volunteer shifts available in the dining room and several clothing sorting and distribution roles. New this year are some fun program support roles as well. It’s easy to apply – we now have a user-friendly online application that opens and pauses depending on our recruitment needs as well as an orientation process that enhances your Our Place volunteer experience. Please visit [www.ourplacesociety.com/volunteer](http://www.ourplacesociety.com/volunteer) to get started.



**At New Roads, working and building new professional skills are important steps on every resident's recovery journey.**

Already, several residents were highly skilled in carpentry and with generous donations of equipment from RONA, safety training from Bird Construction, and expert designs from Rocky Point Bird Observatory, the houses came together quickly.

**New Roads residents built 40 birdhouses that will be installed in the new Town park and on the handyDART property.**

Recently, students at neighbouring Eagle View Elementary school took part in making the birdhouses come to life. They walked along the Galloping Goose learning about the different species that will call the birdhouses home and then everyone returned to the school and got straight to painting. Smocks were donned and everyone was abuzz with excitement about the bright colours of the birdhouses. Several of the residents of New Roads, fathers themselves, particularly enjoyed spending the afternoon together.

**NEW ROADS:** Representatives from New Roads and BC Transit visit Eagle View Elementary to paint birdhouses

The new birdhouses will be installed this spring and will soon be home to Chickadees, Wrens, Nuthatches, and Swallows for many years to come.

**Special thanks to the View Royal community and all our neighbours for your continued support.**



**OUR DONORS**

Sponsored meals are more than just providing meals. They're opportunities to enrich the days of people in our community seeking support, and provide respite from their daily challenges.

And the Neal Estate Group is providing more than just meals. They're providing a committed foundation of support that our community relies on.

For nearly 20 years, Ron Neal has been sponsoring Christmas meals with Our Place. In the winter, it's a celebratory roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and gravy. In the summer, they break out the barbecues for Christmas in July burgers!

And it's not only Ron and his team at the Neal Estate Group showing up every year. Ron's son, Justin, has also been serving these meals since he was young. And Justin's partner, Naelle, had her first job volunteering in our clothing department.

As a community, we're stronger together with families like the Neals. We look forward to seeing everyone again this summer!

**LEGACY OF LOVE**

A PLANNED GIFT CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

OUR PLACE DONORS ARE COMPASSIONATE, kind, and loyal. Living these values like you do is what makes our work possible. You can extend these values beyond your life and create a Legacy of Love for the future with a gift in your will. For more information, write to Janice at [janicek@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:janicek@ourplacesociety.com)

Save The Date - Saturday, Feb. 22

# Warm hearts on the Coldest Night

**W**alk with us towards warmth, healing, and nourishment for our neighbours in need! Our Place Society and Pacific Centre Family Services have teamed up again for the 2025 Coldest Night of the Year charity walkathon.

We invite families, faith, work, and community groups to walk in solidarity, raising funds and awareness to support hungry, homeless, and hurting people in our community during Coldest Night of the Year.

- Connect with our caring community! Join hundreds of compassionate neighbours participating in Canada's fastest growing peer-to-peer fundraising campaign
- Enjoy family-friendly activities before and after the walk
- Warm up with hot food and drink on a cold winter's night
- Collect this year's special toque!

Last year, our community raised over \$192,000 between our two walk locations.

With your support we can make even more of an impact! Please consider gathering a team together and joining us in person or virtually for our 2km or 5km walks.

Register today at:

**Victoria Walk:**

[www.cnoy.org/location/victoriapandora](http://www.cnoy.org/location/victoriapandora)

**Westshore Walk:**

[www.cnoy.org/location/victoriawestshore](http://www.cnoy.org/location/victoriawestshore)

If you are interested in creating a team, sponsoring, or have any questions, please contact:

**Rachel Hesketh, 250-940-5060 ext. 5108, [rachelh@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:rachelh@ourplacesociety.com).**



## Our Place Sponsor Meals



### HELP SERVE HOPE & BELONGING

Over the past 9 months Our Place has experienced a 28% increase in food costs and a 25% increase in the number of people accessing our meals. Your meal sponsorship helps Our Place keep up with rising costs and continue to provide nutritious and hope-filled meals to our neighbours experiencing homelessness and food insecurity.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner sponsorships are available starting at \$600 with the option to come in and serve your meal.

Contact [rachelh@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:rachelh@ourplacesociety.com) to book your meal today!

Learn more about upcoming events at [www.ourplacesociety.com/events/engage](http://www.ourplacesociety.com/events/engage)



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