

Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2017

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

Executive Director's Message

I attended a memorial service at Our Place recently for a man who I had come to know for far too brief a time.

The outpouring of love, affection and sadness over his passing would come as a surprise only to those who didn't know him. Because, while he was part of the family at Our Place, to the outside world he was labelled something far different.

Having lived on the streets, this imposing but gentle man wore his share of demons, the deadliest of which is addiction.

He died too young, and sadly he's not alone.

There is a drug-overdose crisis in our community that is claiming far too many lives, and its impact rains down like hammer blows.

Death is contagious for it follows sorrow and pain as loyally as a dog follows its master.

And while this scourge is compounding the suffering of the already vulnerable people who we take into our arms, it is also taking its toll on our staff.

When someone overdoses in our facility, it is our staff members who are the first responders.

With training, skill and compassion, our staff is saving lives every day. This isn't the job they originally envisioned for themselves, but this is the reality we are faced with due to the unexpected arrival of fentanyl, a drug that is 10,000 times stronger than morphine.



A (tiny) place for the homeless



A compact and thrifty 12-square-foot wooden home on wheels is Victor's solution to homelessness in the capital region. He showed his prototype at Our Place.

It is heartbreaking to lose a member of your family, and at Our Place, everyone is family.

This year, we pledge to fight back. We can't stand by and watch people die, that's simply not who we are. We will work in cooperation with Island Health to continue our mission of keeping people safe, and offering a sanctuary free of judgment and scorn.

I want to thank each and every one of you for your prayers, donations, and continued support.

We couldn't be the welcoming place we strive to be without you.

In gratitude,

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

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!



...ria woodworker Peter Gould's idea for easing ... on Monday, Story, A5 ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST



Our Recent Events

Micro Mobile Home

When **Peter Gould** learned about one of our family members who wasn't accessing shelter because she suffers from acute social anxiety, he was struck by an interesting idea. With his background in engineering and woodworking, he created a prototype of a tiny, mobile camper that could comfortably house one person.

Read the full story on the Our Place website: ourplacesociety.com/mediapublications/news

Stories of Transformation

As part of the **Times Colonist Christmas Fund**, we were able to highlight three special stories of transformation.

After being injured on the job and losing his regular income, **Bob Sellmer** found himself falling on hard times. After going to a local soup kitchen, he discovered Our Place and began to volunteer. Liking what he saw, Bob soon found himself applying for a job in the kitchen. Employment did a lot for him and his self-esteem. "It was a real turnaround, for sure," said Bob.

Lobby ambassador **Gordie McDonald** came to Our Place when he was at his lowest point. Retired, dealing with addiction, and suffering from depression, he struggled to get through each day. But when he finally asked for help, Our Place was there.

Accupressure practitioner **Gordon Hawkins** arrived at Our Place after being diagnosed with schizophrenia. The illness had created storms in his life, but the diagnosis came as a relief because he finally understood why. With the proper medication, Gordon now dedicates his life to giving back.

Read the full stories on Our Place's website: ourplacesociety.com/mediapublications/news

In 2016, Our Place received \$10,000 from the Times Colonist Christmas Fund. Christmas Carol

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

First Met United Church was filled with song from the Open Door Choir @ Our Place as Dickens' masterpiece was read by CBC personalities

Khalil Akhtar, Michael Tymchuk, Bob McDonald, Gregor Craigie, Robyn Burns, Shelagh Rogers and Arthur Black.

CBC Radio & Our Place present
A dramatic reading of Charles Dickens' Classic Tale

A Christmas Carol

Music by Open Door Choir @ Our Place
The Victoria Good News Choir
& Victoria Conservatory of Music
Suzuki Strings Department

Monday, Dec. 12, 2016
7:00pm / Doors: 6:30pm
First Met United, 932 Balmoral Rd

Tickets: \$27** (\$5 Child)

Available at:

- Our Place Society, 919 Pandora Ave., 250-588-7112 Ext. 259
- Buy online at: eventbrite.com
- ourplacesociety.com/christmas-carol

Featuring CBC personalities, including:

All proceeds to benefit Our Place Society

Use not belonging



ANGEL GIFTS: Our Place volunteer Linda Ryder dedicates Christmas to collecting as many presents as possible — then she gives them all away to those who might otherwise go without. Ryder runs Angel Gifts, a program that has been in existence for 14 years. Through the generosity of her fellow Our Place volunteers, local churches, schools, community groups, businesses and government offices, Ryder and Outreach Manager Jordan Cooper delivered over 750 personalized presents to people living in poverty.

Our Family

Clifford's Story

At the end of a hard shift, most of us look forward to heading home, getting into something cozy, and relaxing. For Clifford, however, his bed was a dumpster behind the restaurant where he worked.

For the last four years, Clifford, 34, has worked the evening shift at a local restaurant, cooking up chicken and earning the respect of his employer.

When you meet this young man, it's easy to tell that he takes great pride in being a hard worker and an employee that his boss can count on. So why, one may ask, was he spending his nights curled up behind a dumpster?

The short answer is that Clifford has never been great with money. The moment he gets paid, the cash disappears. But the true answer can only be found by looking deeper into his past.

The ominous shadow of the residential school system that had scooped up his parents and grandparents lay waste to his childhood, sinking its claws into his own feelings of self-worth.

Abandoned by his birth parents, Clifford was raised by "Aunties and Grandmothers." Short in stature, he found school difficult as other students kept picking on "the smallest guy in class."

He made it to Grade 12, but preferred

working over school, and finally stopped going altogether.

Moving from job to job, Clifford got involved in two serious relationships, finding stability for a time before the marriages broke apart.

"I was working a lot," he says in reference to his second partner, "and not giving her what she needed."

After his last break-up, Clifford became more lost than before. He was now the father of seven children with two ex-partners, and work became his only refuge.

With a creative mind, Clifford spent his down time building shelters in the woods "until the police showed up and made me tear them down."

He enjoyed the process, however, and would build shelters for other people who were homeless. After getting tired of being roused by the police, he found a sanctuary behind the restaurant's dumpster. With the blessing of the owners, he built a small shelter and called it home.

But soon that began to take its toll.



LEGACY OF LOVE

A PLANNED GIFT
CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

JOIN THE NEARLY 200 SUPPORTERS of Our Place who have become part of our Legacy of Love program and confirmed or are in the process of including Our Place in their estate 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



"I got tired of being outside," he says with a look that comes across as an apology, as though asking for a warm place to sleep is a sign of weakness.

That's when one of Clifford's aunties introduced him to Kim, an Aboriginal Housing Support Worker at Our Place.

Kim's first piece of advice was to take half of every paycheque that Clifford earned, and put it in a savings account in order to save up first month's rent and damage deposit for an apartment.

With Kim's help, Clifford was soon moving into his own place. The transition, however, isn't as easy as one might imagine.

"I miss outside," says Clifford with a shy

grin. "I was out there so, so long."

When asked what he likes best about being inside, he answers, "Not being worried about some drug addict coming up to me and asking 'Hey, you got this or you got that? You got two?'"

"Which is why you never had any money," Kim interjects.

Clifford shrugs. "When you get indoors, you're so happy, you want to give all your stuff away."

With his focus less on day-to-day survival now, Clifford has other demons to face on his road to feeling a sense of hope and belonging. He wants to provide for his children and find a way to give them a home that he never had.

His gaze drops as he confesses, "I'm amazed I'm still here actually. I think about killing myself every day."

It's a tough admission from a sensitive man who feels lost from his culture, and disconnected from family. It's as if the concept of 'home' is something forever just out of reach.

"The loneliness is still there," he says, "It always will be there. But I'm still here, and I'm doing some good."

Being housed, however, is the first step to healing. And with Our Place's help, Clifford is making plans to begin counselling — something that was far too daunting while living behind a dumpster.

THERE ARE GREAT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES in our administration office, kitchen, hygiene area, and much more. 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 **Julia**, our **Manager of Volunteers**, at 250-388-7112 Ext. 243 or email volunteer@ourplacesociety.com.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF WHAT WE DO



Our Programs

Drop-In Counselling

It took a life-altering incident for Thelma Bridge to finally pursue one of her life-long goals.

An operating room nurse for 35 years, Thelma had come to understand just how important those few quiet moments of reassurance before an operation were to her patients — and she wanted to explore it further.

However, it wasn't until a devastating car accident left her in need of spinal surgery that she decided to pursue her Masters of Nursing with a focus on relational practise.

"I was stuck at home and immobile," she says. "And that was driving me crazy."

With her new degree, and still waiting for a second surgery, Thelma picked up the phone, dialed Our Place and asked how she could help. Drop-In Counselling was born.

"People, especially marginalized people, get frustrated with the medical system, but because I have seen it from both sides — as a nurse and a patient — the Our Place family members came to trust me very quickly," says Thelma.

And trust is the key when you're dealing with people who have faced so much trauma in their lives.

"Some days, I actually feel like I'm simply being a loving mother," says Thelma. "A lot of the family members have never had that. They want reassurance, and someone who can acknowledge the uniqueness in them."

Other days, especially in light of the recent opioid overdose crisis, counselling means finding ways to cope with grief.

"People just want to be heard," she says. "They have been dealing with abandonment and grief for so long."

Her biggest surprise was how engaged everyone was.

"I have not talked to one person who isn't intelligent. There is a lot of frustration around mental health and feeling stigmatized. But they want to be involved in their health care. It's just they've been dealt such a huge curve-ball in life."

But as Thelma can attest, sometimes it takes a curve-ball to finally discover your true path.

NEW PROGRAMS

READING, WRITING & LIFE SKILLS

READING, WRITING & LIFE SKILLS: Camosun College continues to expand its offerings at Our Place this year with Computer Basics 2 and Build Your Reading, Writing & Life Skills. Its friendly and supportive teachers provide skills and aptitude assessments, entry level employment training, numeracy and literacy essential skills, career exploration and job search skills, plus essential computer literacy skills. All levels of student experience is accommodated by the instructors.



Our Donors

“It’s important for us to give back to our community and we hope that others will do the same. We know that giving to Our Place means we are helping those who need it most.”
– Brian and Travis Butler, Butler Brothers Supplies Ltd.

This winter, Our Place Society launched the **OUT OF THE COLD** campaign to urgently raise funds that will provide emergency warmth and nourishment for Victoria’s impoverished citizens during the coldest winter months.

Since most emergency shelters are not open until late evening, it is difficult for many people to find a warm, safe place to keep dry in the hours after dinner. Our Place Society has a plan to help; we have extended the opening hours of our drop-in centre, which will now be open until 9:00 pm each night

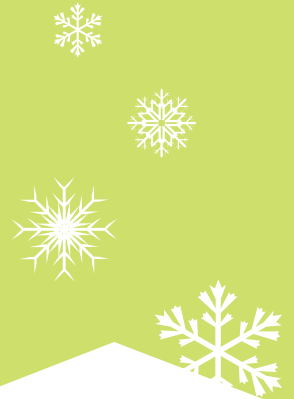
from October through March.

Butler Brothers Supplies Ltd. and a few other generous individuals and businesses have stepped forward with tremendous support to launch Out of the Cold and are challenging others to give generously to this important program.

To find how you can support Out of the Cold please visit ourplacesociety.com/ways-give/out-cold

New Ovens

A generous donor who wishes to remain anonymous has purchased new ovens for Our Place’s busy kitchen. And just in time for our Christmas meal, which served over 1,000 people. We are so thankful for this gift that will have an impact for years to come.



Things We Need

- UNDERWEAR**
- SOCKS**
- WARM JACKETS**
- BLANKETS**
- SLEEPING BAGS**
- DRY GOODS**
- GLOVES**
- 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.

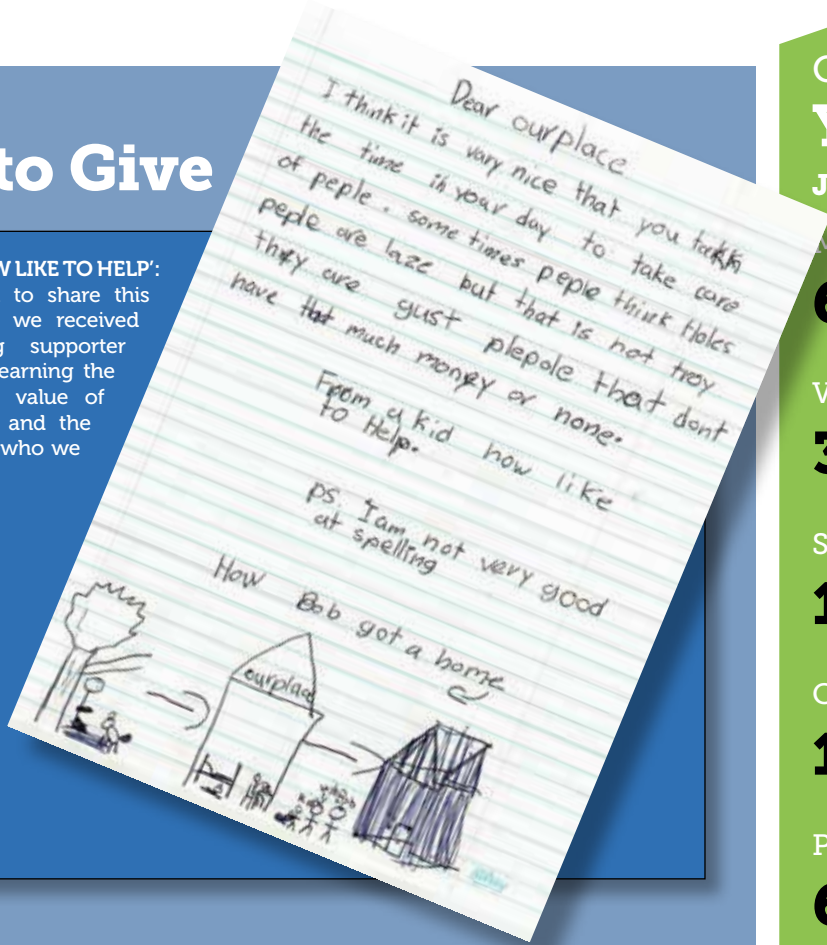
FLOWER ARRANGING: For a serene break from a stressful and oftentimes isolating life, Our Place program volunteers have been filling the lobby with the wonderful scent of flowers and herbs while teaching family members the creative art of flower arranging. Two workshops have been run by the wonderful Vancouver Island artist Roberta Pyx Sutherland.



Creative Ways to Give

FROM A KID 'HOW LIKE TO HELP':

We just wanted to share this wonderful letter we received from a young supporter who is already learning the importance and value of both Our Place and the family members who we serve.



Our Place Year End Stats

January - December, 2016

Meals Served
698,676



Volunteer Hours
33,818



Showers in Hygiene
14,363



Crisis Interventions
1795



Programs Offered
68



* December stats are estimated

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."

This year, local philanthropists joined forces to provide matching funds for every donation made on Giving Tuesday.

The two-day online campaign ended up raising over \$95,000.



Your Help is Needed this Winter

This has been a difficult year with more vulnerable and marginalized people seeking solace, food and shelter at Our Place. With winter hitting hard, we have opened our Drop-in for longer hours 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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