

ourplace society

A Changing Landscape



By Grant McKenzie,
Director of
Communications

Our Place is not the same today as it was the day before, and it won't be the same tomorrow.

In this strange and difficult time, my heart breaks with sorrow at the vulnerable people struggling to survive with yet another

obstacle in their path, but my heart also swells with pride at the people who are stepping up to help.

Working on the frontlines is not an easy task, but add in an invisible yet potentially deadly pandemic, and you can imagine the stress that our staff is going through.

In a case of serendipity, Our Place had bolstered its Outreach team with several paramedics in response to the Fentanyl crisis that has been wreaking havoc on those suffering from addiction over the last two years. Those paramedics are now busier than ever — not with more opioid overdoses, but with treating a scared population that doesn't fully understand our planet's new social order.

As we move funds to where they're most needed, adding more hours for paramedics was at the top of the list.

When I walk among the many people huddled in tents or tarps or even just a blanket, one of the first questions I get asked is: "Will the shelter still be open tonight?" Thankfully, so far, the answer continues to be "Yes."

Our Place offers beds in four locations, housing around 176 people.

The question I don't get asked is: "Where will I eat?"



The reason for that is simple. Our Place has never stopped providing three meals per day. And as this pandemic continues, we endeavour to make more food options available. Due to social distancing, our kitchen staff need to think more creatively as they plan one-bowl meals that can be safely handed out at our front gates. We are also busy providing

water, tea, coffee and milk.

The biggest challenge is that everything we need to do in the face of this pandemic is virtually the exact opposite of what Our Place is known for. Our five locations spring from one, that we call a community centre for a reason. The inside of our Pandora Avenue

building is a place of hope and belonging where people can escape the social isolation brought about by stigma, shame, mental illness, and poverty.

We know that isolation leads to depression, which, sadly, can also lead to overdoses from people trying to self-medicate. Our whole purpose is to bring people in from isolation, to offer them a dry, safe home and a feeling of family who cares enough to find them the resources and help they need.

Now, in this age of social distancing, we have to redefine ourselves; to look at our strengths and see where we can redeploy our skills and services.

In truth, we're needed more than ever. Our frontline team is interacting with the street



population every day, accessing their needs, handing out tents, sleeping bags, and emergency supplies. Our paramedics are treating wounds, overdoses, and more than a few panic attacks. And behind the scenes, our incredible custodial team is doubling its efforts to keep our environment as sterile as possible so that our staff remains healthy enough to help those without any other resources.

We are also working hand-in-hand with our provincial and city governments, and our sister charities to deal with

a situation none of us have faced before, and one that changes daily.

When this health crisis is over, and yes I believe that is in our future, Our Place will need to rebuild. We will need to rebuild trust with the people we serve who feel, once again, they are unworthy of the same assistance and support that housed people receive. We will need to rebuild our shared vision with our supporters who have now seen what happens without Our Place in full operation. And we will need to rebuild our determined voice crying out for a better solution to homelessness, along with an increase in indoor shelter and permanent housing, so that in the future, people won't need to pitch a tent on the streets of Pandora.

Our Place won't be the same tomorrow as it is today, but that is not a bad thing. Thanks to your continued support, encouragement and faith, we will be stronger than ever.



"...it is like you don't know what you have until it is gone. I am so grateful for all Our Place does for us and I miss it right now."
- Renee

Our Place March 2020 Statistics

1,400 meals per day

1,200 bottles of water per day

200+ tents & tarps handed out

500+ blankets & sleeping bags handed out

6 trained paramedics

200 Home base for mail for people

Shelter space for 176 people



Hope and Belonging

HEALTHY LIVING INSIDE

Volunteers: The Lifeblood of Our Place

At Our Place, we love and care about our volunteers. And we want them to stay safe and healthy. Therefore, during the pandemic crisis, we've had to say goodbye to more than 800 loyal and active volunteers.

Their absence has created a huge gap. Our year-round, talented, caring, compassionate and dedicated volunteer team is crucial in core services and programs.

Specialty program volunteers support areas of culture, health, wellness and specialized services; whereas our operational volunteers answer phones, sort and distribute clothes, prepare and serve food, clean showers, offer a listening ear, and help with administrative tasks and special events. Who are they? They are people of

all ages, including grandparents who want to give back, students brimming with energy and enthusiasm, health professionals who realize their services are often inaccessible by family members, those who have lived on the street and want to help their peers, and gifted people who can transform an afternoon of tedious monotony into one of shared delight.

They are our friends. Friends we care about and miss every day. Our Place has almost 200 staff over five locations who interact daily with volunteers and are sadly feeling their loss. Personally, I miss Ruth, who brightens my day with her smile (and sometimes shares a coffee with me) and Anita, who is often embarrassed by my exuberance.

Over 70% of our volunteers have made Our Place that much brighter for over a year and 20% have supported us for longer than 5 years! And, 90% say 'giving back' is their prime motivation.

It pains us deeply that, for the safety of those we serve and our volunteers, we've had to close our Drop in Centre to make room for shelter mats, and adapt programs due to social distancing requirements. We care and depend on our volunteers too deeply to take any chances. We're already looking forward with gratitude to their return. What a celebration that will be!

Stay safe and healthy.



Holt Sivak,
OPS Director of Programs
and Services



Paramedic Jonathon performing a wellness check on Yanni.

Staff paramedics; an invaluable resource

Our six staff paramedic outreach workers help to alleviate the pressure on the health care system by providing medical assistance which reduces emergency room visits. They respond to overdoses, take care of those suffering mental health crises, and triage those who need further medical attention. During this pandemic, they counsel the fearful and provide much-needed education about self-care and hygiene.



▲ Aline M. (centre) with fellow volunteers at a recent Our Place Harvest Brunch Fundraiser.

“Volunteering at Our Place for almost five years has been one of the most gratifying experiences of my life. I am inspired by how Our Place shows unconditional love to people most in need of it, and have been regularly shown kindness and love in return.”

- Aline M,
loyal Our Place Society Volunteer



“The Volunteer Services team misses our volunteers and their daily contributions of time and talents. We hope we are all reconnected when health and safety prevails.”

- Dawn Barr,
Volunteer Services Manager

THE 2020
CHARITY  100

MacLean's Magazine ranked Our Place Society as one of the best 100 Charities in Canada for 2020.

 **ourplace**
Hope and Belonging

Help from Home



Hope and Belonging

The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members. - Mahatma Gandhi

Alex used to come to Our Place three times a day for meals. The Drop-in Centre was the only home Alex knew. There, he got mail, had access to computers, had a hot shower, a cup of coffee, snacks and was able to get his feet treated. But now, Alex and hundreds of people like him can't come through our doors to relax and feel safe.



Like others experiencing life on the streets or living in poverty, he's focused on his day-to-day survival. He doesn't fully understand the current pandemic.

Stay home. Wash your hands. Observe social distancing.

Following these rules is not easy. For those without a home, it's almost impossible.

To maintain social distancing, we can now only serve people in our courtyard and sidewalk. Our paramedic-outreach workers are still conducting wellness checks, administering First-Aid and saving lives when overdoses happen. Our spiritual care team is still providing calming messages of hope, belonging, comfort and care. And we're distributing mail and relaying messages from parents and friends worried about what's happening to their loved ones.

Alex used to enjoy talking with our staff and a few special volunteers. Unfortunately, we've had to say goodbye to over 800 loyal volunteers – for their own protection from COVID-19. This has put extra strain on our dedicated staff and increased the costs of our food bills. To cover these added staff and food costs, we're asking for your help.

From the safety of your home, please help support our most vulnerable citizens today with a donation to provide for their basic needs.

Our Place is the largest emergency meal provider in our community. We've adapted to this situation by providing take out meals three times a day. All served with dignity and respect.

We're currently providing shelter for 176 hungry, hurting and homeless people in four locations. And for those unable to find indoor shelter, we've distributed hundreds of tents, sleeping bags, tarps and toiletries.

You can care for Alex and hundreds more by making a donation today. From your home to ours, your donation will also deliver hope for those we serve and for our tireless staff working on the frontlines.

P.S. You can remind Our Place family members that they are not alone by sending messages of hope to TracyC@ourplacesociety.com Tracy will print your messages out and tuck it into a take-out meal.

Thank you!

Thank you to our fantastic corporate and community supporters for stepping up during this crisis!



Shelley Gilberg of PwC Victoria



Our Place staff collecting sleeping bags and tents



Jill Van Gyn of Fatso Peanut Butter

How to Donate

Use your credit card and make your donation anytime through our safe and secure online page at www.ourplacesociety.com, or call us at 250-940-5060 weekdays from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, or by e-transfer to finance@ourplacesociety.com

Thank you so much.

Our Place Society, 919 Pandora Avenue, Victoria, BC V8V 3P4

Admired: Portrait of Female Leaders



Catherine Holt,
Victoria Chamber
CEO

You are invited to the unveiling of 40 portraits of amazing female leaders in our region. This online gallery was created by artist Elfrida Schragen as a unique project to benefit Our Place Society. After spending time with each subject, Elfrida created portraits that reflect their personality and story. Visit and be inspired!



Bernice Kamono,
Advocate

"I painted these portraits to honour women in my community whom I, and others, find admirable and effective in whatever they do in life."



Shelly Green,
Supt. of Schools
District 61

All the money raised will support the vital work Our Place offers to some of Greater Victoria's most vulnerable women struggling with poverty, mental or physical challenges, or homelessness.

Thanks to the support and co-operation of her subjects, Elfrida's portraits feature dozens of admired women from Greater Victoria who have achieved notoriety in a variety of areas, including: Community Connections: Carolyne Taylor, Politics: Lisa Helps; Theatre: Lina De Guevera; Religion: Shana Lynngood; Business: Catherine Holt; Media: Leslie Campbell; Education: Dawn Smith; Arts: Carol Sabiston; Indigenous Leadership: Florence Dick - Songhees Nation.

Ready to be Inspired... and Help Women in Your Community?

Please visit the Our Place Online Gallery to check out each portrait and read their story. Then, decide which of the women portrayed you would like to pay tribute to by making an online donation to Our Place Society. We are hoping to reach the goal of \$1,000 for each portrait. Perhaps consider forming a group to reach that goal? All bidders will be invited to a future art show of the completed portraits.

Funds raised will support the Women in Progress project and our Next Steps to Employment program. In its first year, the Next Steps job readiness program saw 106 participants graduate, and 60% have been hired or are in work experience programs. The unique Women in Progress project was developed by manager, Ashley MacDonald. It invites those who identify as female to complete customized skills training sessions, and ensures they feel safe, confident and encouraged to take the 'next steps' to a better future for themselves and their families.



About the Artist: Elfrida Schragen

Elfrida has been a key supporter of Our Place for decades. Visitors to our dining hall at 919 Pandora will see the stunning portraits she has created of "family members" and volunteers. Each painting conveys the story of the individual portrayed. Some have since died – which only strengthens the fact that their portrait stands as a testament that every person is unique and that their life mattered. To visit our gallery, donate towards a portrait, and help women in our community www.ourplacesociety.com/events



IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS, PLEASE SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY BY SPONSORING A HOT, NUTRITIOUS MEAL FOR THOSE IN NEED!

The need has never been greater. Our Place is having to switch to takeout meals to continue supporting our community's hungry and hurting.

Every day we serve 1,400 meals and 1,200 bottles of water. As well, we are continuing to provide vital services and outreach support.

By sponsoring a meal, you can provide nutritious comfort food and serve your community in a meaningful way.

**\$600 WILL PROVIDE A HOT MEAL
FOR 400 PEOPLE**
(\$1,000 will provide a full day of meals)

In return, we will acknowledge your generous partnership on social media, in our website and on our E-blast to over 6000 followers.

Together, feel the unity that comes from helping those less fortunate. Promote the good values of your staff, students or church community by helping Greater Victoria's hungry and hurting.

KNOW YOU'RE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

If your group or organization would like to sponsor a meal, or you have further questions about how you can help, contact stevens@ourplacesociety.com or 250-940-5064

www.ourplacesociety.com

ourplace meal sponsors: April 2020

We are so grateful to the following businesses and individuals who have stepped forward to either sponsor a hot meal, or a full day of meals:

Day of Meal sponsors (\$1000+)

Anonymous
Faculty member from Camosun's Trades and Technology Department
Gale Anshelm & Family
Canadian Tire Hillside
Christ Church Cathedral
Dodd's Furniture
Erb Technical Contracting Ltd
Knappett Projects Inc.
Leon Judah Blackmore Fdn.
OPS Board of Directors
Jennifer Pereira
Innovative Communities.Org Fdn.
Paddy Stewart
Ron Sur

Tower Fence Products
Upanup Studios
Urban Systems
Hot Meal Sponsors (\$600)
John van Dyk
The Koo Javits Cecchetti family
Meeta Kurana
May Gold Village
Masjid Al – Iman Mosque
Sweetpal Chauhan (Shell Victoria stations)
Rob Tournour Masonry Ltd.
Aline Mortimer
Veronica Osborn
Concert Properties
Sara Neely

