



Our Stories

SUMMER NEWSLETTER
2019

4



BLANCHE

inside

3

Our Events

Hungry Hearts raises \$150,000 for Our Place

4

Our Family

Special moments never used to mean anything to Blanche, but this year is decidedly different

6

Our Programs

Alex was at a loss, another job had fallen by the wayside and he was unemployed once again

7

Our Donors

"It's amazing, totally amazing, the services you provide for people," says Geralee

8

Creative Ways To Give

Over 300 walkers raised more than \$55,000 for Our Place's second Coldest Night of the Year walk for homelessness



Hope and Belonging



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Chief Executive Officer's Message

It's hard to imagine that a full year has passed since we opened the doors to our Next Steps to Employment program.

We knew going in that we had to do something unique if we were going to reach the population that we serve, and we have learned a lot along the way.

Our emphasis on pre-employment skills has proven to be one of the strongest elements of this program's success. So many of the participants come to us with a genuine fear that they just aren't good enough to join or re-join the workforce.

They have faced obstacle after obstacle and rejection after rejection until their self-esteem is at rock bottom. So it's our job to let them know that we're not just going to slap a new coat of paint (or new clothes) on them and send them out into the world alone.

Instead, we're teaching them how to alleviate those fears and feel good about themselves. This means making sure they know we have their back and will support them through every step, including the very important "after being hired" phase.

One of our recent success stories, Alex, is featured on Page 6 of this newsletter, and I hope you find it as inspiring as I do.

In the first year, Next Steps has completed five Job Clubs (12-week program) and supported 89 people, 66% of whom have graduated. For many, this means finding resources to help them become more stable around mental health, housing and addictions.

Partnership agreements are in place with



more than 20 local employers who have committed to recruiting and supporting vulnerable people within the program. Plus, 12 partners have program graduates working in their organizations. We also encourage participants to use the centre's resources to search for employment themselves, which has resulted in a number of successful hirings.

With a segment of our participants experiencing chronic difficulties working within a traditional work environment, we have also been exploring more non-traditional forms of employment, including small self-employment endeavours.

It's still early in this program's development, but I am thrilled with how far we've already come.

With much gratitude,

Don Evans
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 increased programs, services and outreach offered would not have been possible without the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters.



< **HUNGRY HEARTS:** Unique fundraiser raises \$150,000 to help Victoria's most vulnerable.



Our Events

Hungry Hearts

The vibrant business and philanthropic community pulled out all the stops for the sixth anniversary of Hungry Hearts, a unique foody fundraiser for Our Place.

Top local chefs and rising new talents used their culinary expertise and imagination in a fierce competition to see who could create the most popular savory and sweet bites.

"We are overwhelmed by the continued generosity of the community," says Don Evans, CEO of Our Place. "This financial sustenance will go a long way in supporting many of our life-transforming programs and services to assist people

in crisis, recovery or on the road to employment."

Guests were invited to "vote with their heart" in crowning their favourite dish. In a finger-licking finish, Chef Nicolas Hipperson of the Union Club took home the Hungry Hearts Top Chef trophy for the first time with seared Atlantic scallop, English pea tortellini, carrot ginger emulsion, and pea shoot salad.

"People love to support great causes that truly improve their community," says Marg Rose, director of philanthropy. "That couldn't have been made more clear than with the hundreds of sponsors, ticket purchasers, matching donors and volunteers who came together to make our signature fundraiser such a great success."

The sold-out event, presented by PwC Canada and hosted at The Delta Hotels by Marriott Victoria Ocean Pointe Resort, raised a whopping \$150,000.

Easter Meal

Our Place hosted our annual Easter Meal with the hard-working support of our fabulous donors, volunteers, staff and local dignitaries.

Hundreds of people lined up to enjoy a family feast of baked ham, scalloped potatoes, and garden vegetables.

And for dessert, Victoria Cream chocolate eggs donated by Rogers' Chocolates. You can view a special video on our website at: ourplacesociety.com/easter-2019

To view all the latest news, updates, videos and photos be sure to visit our website or follow us on Facebook at: facebook.com/ourplacesociety



< **MINISTER VISITS OUR PLACE:** The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development dropped by Our Place in March to help serve up lunch.

Our Family

Blanche's Story

Special moments never used to mean anything to Blanche. Memorable days just didn't exist for a woman whose daily drive was focused on pure survival.

"When I found myself out on the streets, I lost hope," she says. "When you lose hope, then everything else goes with it."

But this year is decidedly different. This year, Blanche has a lot of moments to celebrate.

A petite woman with a big smile that has only grown brighter over the last few months, Blanche is celebrating one year of sobriety thanks to the connections she has made at Our Place.

"When I walked into Our Place, the transition started right there," she says. "Kelsey (Blanche's housing support worker) made me feel like I matter. She was so easy to talk to and that helped rebuild my self-esteem."

"You are in a cloud of depression. Not really knowing how you got there or how to get out of it."

— *Blanche*



WATCH VIDEO: Blanche's story: <https://www.ourplacesociety.com/blanche-her-own-words>

Getting sober and staying sober is a difficult task when you're living on the street, explains Blanche. "You are in a cloud of depression. Not really knowing how you got there or how to get out of it."

The 53-year-old, divorced mother of three lost control of her life when an abusive relationship came to a violent conclusion. After witnessing their mother being beaten and abused, the children moved in with their biological father.

Alone, Blanche fell into depression and began hanging out with friends who drank in groups on the street.

Thinking she could help, she would invite her friends to stay at her place, but that quickly escalated into the loss of her own housing.

"I was on the streets for years," she says. "Rain, snow, didn't matter."

 **a legacy of love**
Provide hope and belonging for the future

Imagine knowing that it's possible for you to continue to help your neighbours in need for years to come. Naming Our Place Society in your will or estate plan is a fantastic way to leave a life-changing legacy that makes a compassionate difference in the lives of Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens for years to come. To learn how you can make an impactful future gift with a bequest or assigning life insurance proceeds to Our Place Society, please visit our website for ideas at: www.ourplacesociety.com/ways-give/legacy-giving, or call Norma Cameron at 250-940-5066.



NEW HOME: Blanche looks out at the view from the patio of her new apartment

A new boyfriend introduced her to crack cocaine and her addiction grew out of control. Her only place of refuge was Our Place where she went for meals and just to be somewhere she felt safe.

Eventually, she applied for transitional housing knowing that Our Place didn't allow guests in the rooms and that she would be able to access important services such as detox.

"I went to treatment for the first time," she says with a smile. "And I'm taking a computer course offered by Camosun College here at Our Place."

Sobriety and stable housing brought a new light into Blanche's life.

For the first time, she attended her daughter's graduation. It wasn't for high school, however, but university. The proud mom beams. Her daughter is now studying for her Master's degree.

Blanche also began volunteering at the Nutrition Bar on Our Place's busy Drop-In floor.

"I want to give back to the people who helped me," she says.

With her life getting back on track, Blanche received even more good news: her application for permanent housing was approved recently.

Looking around her brand new, one-bedroom apartment, Blanche can hardly believe her luck.

"It's huge. It has a huge bedroom, a huge living room, my own patio. It's gorgeous. I'm not dreaming anymore. This is reality."

And this time, Blanche won't be journeying alone.

Accompanied by newfound knowledge and skills needed to make healthier choices for the future she wants to see, Blanche will also have the continued support of Our Place's Aboriginal Support Worker.

"I am determined now," she says. "I have hope again."

The B.C. Family Information Liaison Unit came to Our Place in April to hold an information table for the family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Family members were able to get current information on loved one's cases, including updates on police investigations and coroner's reports.

LIAISON UNIT

INDIGENOUS WOMEN



Our Programs

Alex's Journey to Employment



ALEX

Alex was at a loss. Another job had fallen by the wayside and he was unemployed once again.

With the high cost of rent taking all his savings, Alex was accessing Our Place for meals, programs and socializing with friends.

"I was getting fired a lot," the Victoria native admits. "That was discouraging."

But the reason for the firings was complex. At 33, Alex has been dealing with schizophrenia and severe anxiety for most of his life, plus the strong medication he's on affects his memory.

"He was very confused on his medications," says Ashley, job coach at Our Place's Next Steps To Employment program. "Which made it very difficult for him to keep to a schedule."

While a lot of people might give up and become a ward of the welfare system, Alex was determined to work.

"I like to work," he says with a shy smile, his eyes darting up from his lap for the briefest of moments. "It keeps me distracted. Keeps my depression away."

Having talked to an Outreach worker on the Our Place Drop-In floor, Alex was referred

to Next Steps To Employment. Despite his anxiety, Alex gathered the courage to give it a try.

"He was motivated to succeed," says Ashley. "Plus we empowered him enough to talk with his doctor and get the dosage of his prescription drugs lowered. It's made a huge difference."

Upon graduating the program, Alex landed a job as a dishwasher at St. Michael's University School.

"They love him there," Ashley adds.

The Next Steps To Employment program is unique in that once a graduate is employed, the program continues to work with both the client and the employer to work through any hurdles that may come up.

Now that he's working a steady job again, Alex is working with Ashley to acquire new I.D. and a bank account so he can have direct deposit of his paycheques (and avoid the fees at cheque-cashing outlets.)

Without the financial worry of unemployment, Alex is also working on healthier ways to deal with his diabetes and social anxiety.

We are still pursuing sustainable funding for this vital program. If you can help, please contact Marg Rose at 250-940-5067.

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE LEAVES IN OUR TEA POT

BECOME PART OF A DYNAMIC TEAM of compassionate people assisting Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. Volunteer orientation sessions happen every month and are the best way to find out more about who we are, what we do and how you can get involved! For more information, visit our website or call Dawn, our Manager of Volunteers, at 250-388-7112 Ext. 258.



Our Donors

Donor Geralee Traunweiser saw the immediate difference her memorial gift to Our Place made.

Staff thanked her for her thoughtful consideration by inviting her to join family members and tour Our Place for the first time this year.

"It's amazing, totally amazing, the services you provide for people. I didn't realize what you housed there!" Geralee said. "The kitchen. The services for seniors. The showers. The storage. The counselling. The work you do is quite eye-opening."

Geralee hadn't been inside Our Place since a memorial service several years ago.

Geralee's good friend lost a daughter to addiction. When the daughter became very ill, the mother was able to get her to hospital, and was by her side when she died. Her memorial was held at Our Place. She was 32.

"My friend wanted it there because [her daughter] knew people from Our Place. That was a good thing."

This is only part of the very personal reasons

GERALEE TRAUNWEISER: Gave to Our Place in memory of her friend's daughter, and her own cousin

why Geralee decided to make a generous donation to Our Place. The substantial amount was not what Geralee would normally be able to give — she lives a modest life — but she gave in memory of her friend's daughter, and her own cousin.

Geralee's cousin, the only son of her aunt and uncle, died while living on the streets. He was in his 40s. He struggled with mental health, and drug and alcohol addictions issues.

"They had a lot of ups and downs with him," says Geralee. Eventually, he left home and disappeared into street life.

Geralee's aunt had saved money for her son, and when her aunt died, the son was located, with the intention to give him the inheritance and a way off the streets. But he died, "before anything could happen," and the inheritance was distributed among the family.

Geralee decided to donate her portion of the inheritance to Our Place.

"It made me feel really good. I wanted to do something for him, and to help people like him, and it was my pleasure to do it, because these people sure need help. I know the struggle, and how it affected the family," says Geralee of her gift.



< **FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** We are so grateful to Robin, AJ and the 98.5 Ocean team for joining us in the Our Place courtyard to serve up Tim Hortons treats. Listeners of the show donated their Roll Up The Rim winners to the station who then had the winnings matched and more by Tim Hortons on Shelbourne to deliver 222 coffees, 144 donuts and 120 sandwiches.

Things We Need

- SUMMER CLOTHING**
- SUN SCREEN**
- LIP BALM**
- FLIP-FLOPS**
- SOCKS & UNDERWEAR**
- FIRST-AID PACKS**
- TENTS & TARPS**
- TOILETRIES**
- BLANKETS**
- SLEEPING BAGS**
- BOTTLED WATER**
- FRUITS & VEGETABLES**

SUMMER IS ALMOST HERE! Our fellow citizens in need will feel the heat of day and chill of night on the streets of Greater Victoria. Empty your closets and garages to bring summer protection, food and blankets to Our Place. Donations can be dropped off at the front desk anytime of day or night. If you need assistance, please call 250-388-7112.

Creative Ways to Give



COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR: Over 300 walkers raised more than \$55,000 for Our Place's second Coldest Night of the Year walk for homelessness in February. "On the coldest nights, we try to get as many people indoors as possible," says Our Place CEO Don Evans. "But, unfortunately, there are still people left outside. This walk allowed the community to come together and show how much they care about the most vulnerable members of society." Save The Date for next year's walk on Feb 22, 2020.

Extended Summer Hours

Now this is exciting. When Our Place first opened its doors over 10 years ago, we envisioned a time when we could be open from early morning until late evening every day.

We know that for the people we serve, the more hours we are open, the better their lives are. And now, with your generous support, Our Place is so happy to finally be able to extend its summer hours until 9 p.m. every single day, seven days per week. With the funding we received from donors and government partners (City of Victoria, BC Housing, and Island Health), 2019 marks the first time we will be open from 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., 365 days of the year. We couldn't do it without you!



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 up to 350 family members. Our talented kitchen staff prepares a cooked breakfast. A small fee of \$500 covers the cost of the food, and we encourage a financial donation on top. Lunches, dinners and summer barbeques can also be sponsored.



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

Our Place From the Heart



UNITED FOR WOMEN: Huge thank you to United Way Greater Victoria for a fantastic donation of much-needed feminine hygiene products. When you're homeless and/or living in poverty this is so important.



SOCK IT TO US: The amazing students and teachers from Dunsmuir Middle School collected over 5,000 pairs of socks. Thank you for your generosity.

Make a Donation

To speak with us regarding financial donations, address updates or tax receipt questions, please call:

250-940-5060

To donate clothing or in-kind gifts, please call our main reception number at **250-388-7112** or drop items off anytime at 919 Pandora Avenue.


Hope and Belonging

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