



# THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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On the inside: the residential pod of Our Place's therapeutic recovery community, shown during a tour on Saturday. PHOTOS BY DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

## First look at a second chance



ROXANNE EGAN-ELLIOTT  
Times Colonist

**C**huck Thompson feels lucky to have a second chance at life after struggling with addiction, homelessness and time in jail.

Thompson is a resident of a new therapeutic recovery community in View Royal. The program opened in October 2018 in a building on Talcott Road that previously operated as a youth detention facility. Extensive renovations, carried out by volunteers with HeroWork, have just wrapped on the site, turning the former institution into a place for healing and a home for up to 50 men.

The new space features an arts-and-crafts room, an outside food production area, a long house, a healing garden and a large dining room where staff eat lunch with residents.

Large communal spaces are filled with natural light, comfortable couches and artwork on the walls. Former cells have been repainted and redecorated to remove the institutional feel.

"Most of the individuals, if not all of them, have been in jail, so we don't want them to feel like they're in a jail," said Don Evans, executive director of Our Place, the organization that runs the program.

The two-year recovery program consists of four phases: orientation, primary treatment of trauma and addiction, re-entry to the workforce or to school, and maintaining connections as alumni.

The long-term focus of the program is modelled after the San Patrignano Therapeutic Community in Italy and is rare in Canada.

Evans said most recovery programs in Canada last 30 or 60 days. Our Place is collecting data on the program's success in the hopes it will help inform how Canada approaches addictions recovery in the future.

Dana Young, the program



Chuck Thompson is a resident of the new facility in View Royal.

director, suggested that one reason why Canada has so few long-term treatment programs is their cost. Our Place's program aims to be nearly self-sufficient — the men are growing their own food, cooking their own meals, and cleaning and maintaining the building themselves.

Funding for the program comes from the B.C. Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, which invested \$4.7 million, and from B.C. Housing, which provided \$310,000 for initial renovations. B.C. Housing is also covering property taxes for the first three years and providing a lease for just \$1 per year.

Island Health is providing \$300,000 for annual operating funds, but the funding will decrease each year.

There are currently 13 residents in the recovery program. Men can enter through the court system as an alternative to incarceration, as a transition after leaving jail or if they're living on the street.

Thompson found his way to the program after seeing a brochure in jail. He applied several times over the course of a few months, and was accepted in May.

Every resident in the program has a job. At the moment, the men work in the kitchen or in the maintenance department. As more residents enter the program, staff will develop landscaping and woodworking roles as well.

Since entering the program,



A crowd gathers on the courtyard for the recovery community's open house.



Visitors view the pond and landscaping outside the recovery centre.

Thompson has started working in the kitchen, running the lunch program. He said he developed a love of baking while in jail from watching baking shows on television, and now he bakes muffins and cookies daily for the other men.

The program depends on the residents supporting and holding one other accountable. Senior residents become mentors to newer members. "It's really a program about changing your whole life — getting some goals and direction and purpose, and then pursuing that," Young said.

The program is focused on men because they make up about 80 per cent of people living on the street, and the two provincial prisons on Vancouver Island house men, Young said. Our Place hopes to open a facility for women as well.

More than 500 HeroWork volunteers donated their time over the past three months to renovate the facility. Darryl Patterson, a contractor, has been involved in the project since day one. He spent every Saturday volunteering, giving 53 hours of his time to the project.

"To watch this place turn from

a jail into what it is now — a rehabilitation centre — is actually pretty crazy," he said. "The team is, hands down, probably one of the best crews I've worked with."

HeroWork undertakes "radical renovations" to support charitable organizations in the region.

Evans said it has been therapeutic for the residents to see the hundreds of volunteers dedicate their time to transforming the space. "They just feel this love and compassion and generosity, and they know that this is being done for them."

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