



NEWSLETTER Summer 2012

Our Place Society
919 Pandora Avenue
Victoria, BC V8V 3P4
Tel: 250-388-7112
info@ourplacesociety.com
ourplacesociety.com



Inside this issue:

- *Read One Man's Story of Recovery*
- *Easter Highlights*
- *Check out our Book Mobile*



Executive Director's Message

by Don Evans

Since joining Our Place Society as Executive Director on March 1, I have had the opportunity to work with a skilled team dedicated to alleviating the effects of urban poverty in Greater Victoria. Though it feels as if I just got here, I know that much has been accomplished in these initial months.

I was initially impressed by how our staff and volunteers facilitated a culture of hope and belonging for our Family. This is not just a catch-phrase we like to throw around; these values permeate everything we

do. When one is sleeping on the streets, his or her sense of hope for the future can be in short supply. At Our Place, we want to intervene and reinvigorate what could be a despondent outlook. We want to remind our Family Members of their inherent human dignity. Similarly, I've noticed how our devoted staff cultivates a culture of hope not only for the Family, but for the rest of us too: co-workers, volunteers, and the wider community. We continue to encourage each other to hope and believe that change is possible for Greater Victoria's hungry, homeless, and hurting. We must continue to remind each other that it doesn't have to be this way.

The poor might always be with us, but that doesn't mean we can't actively transform individual lives. Whether that means providing someone with regular meals, offering them a room in one of our 45 transitional housing units, or connecting someone with detox and recovery programs, we must be encouraged by the knowledge that what we do makes a difference in the lives of real, hurting individuals. I have hope that together, with you, we can break individual cycles of poverty in Greater Victoria.

Our Place is in a time of exciting transition. We are redefining our vision so that we can effectively meet the needs of the whole person by alleviating multiple forms of hunger – whether physical, social, or emotional. With this in mind, we are in the process of broadening our services to include more recreational,

spiritual, and educational programs. We want to be good stewards with your support, and know that this is an effective answer to a deep need.

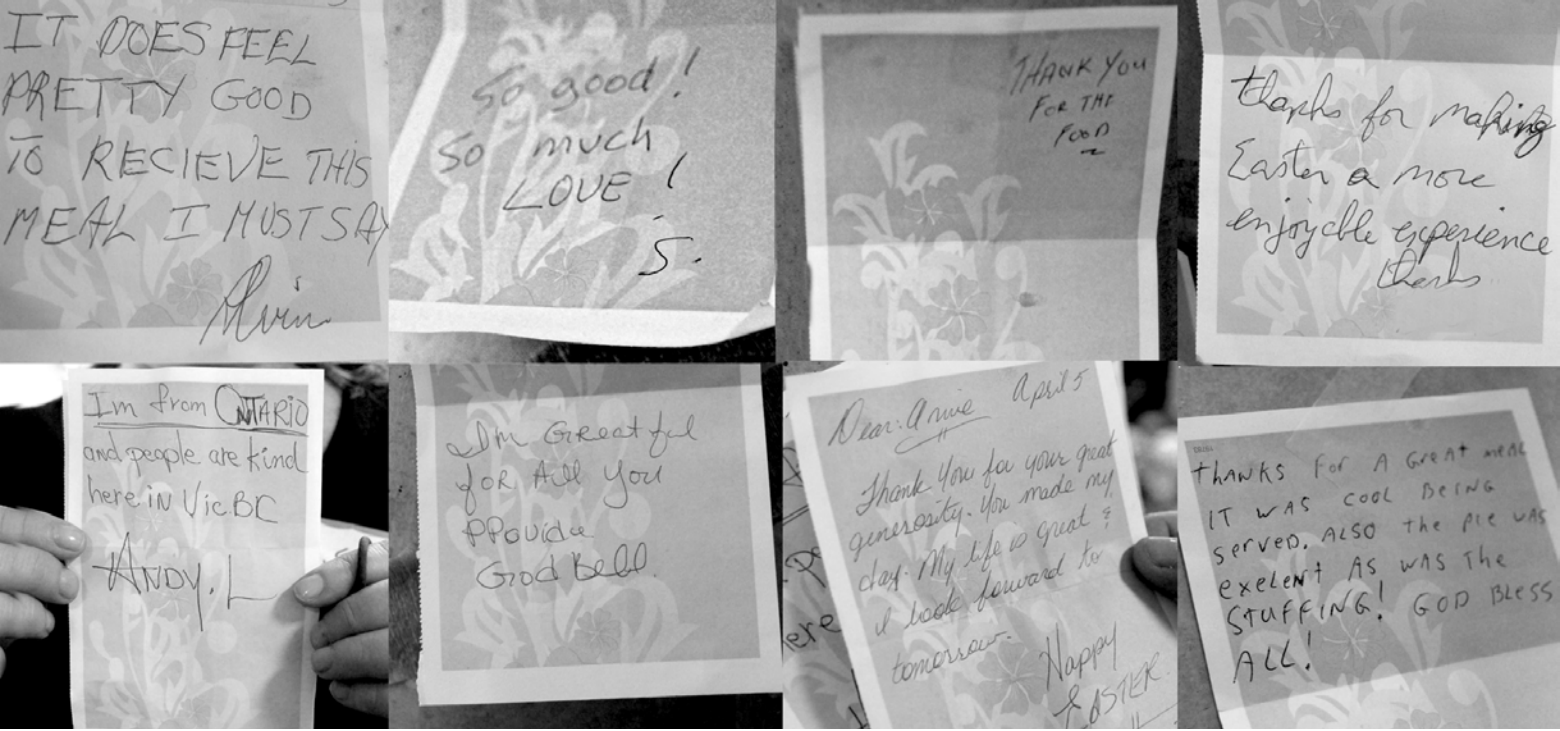
We invite you, the wider community, to actively

partner with us in this process. Whether volunteering, developing new programs, or offering your service on-site, there is a myriad of ways that you can come alongside and collaborate with our staff to bring hope to the hungry and hurting. As you may know, it is our goal to open Our Place seven days a week. I believe that by working together, and using this space to its potential, we can reach our goal of staying open on weekends.

It is a gift to be involved in this process. I am eager to get going – but in all honesty, it feels as if a lot of positive transition is already underway. With your help, I look forward to meeting deeper needs by extending hope to Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens in ways both big and small. Whether expanding our services or simply entering someone's story, I know that every piece of hope offered will have lasting results.

Don Evans
Executive Director

“ *At Our Place, we want to intervene and reinvigorate what could be a despondent outlook.* ”



Easter at Our Place

Our dining hall was a buzz of activity on Thursday, April 5th as we celebrated Easter with the Our Place Family. Tables overflowed with lilies, chocolate, and Easter-themed place-cards while Family Members enjoyed the feast together. Drummers provided ambience in the background and people hummed along as they waited in line for coffee. Volunteers and Family alike wore rabbit ears while everyone filled their plates to celebrate this new season of hope – and hope was served!

We had 40 hard-working volunteers join our team. Together, with kitchen staff, they spent an extra-long work day cooking and serving 1000 lbs of turkey, 800 lbs of potatoes, 350 lbs of stuffing, 300 lbs of vegetables, 35 gallons of gravy, 65 lbs of cranberry sauce, and 175 apple pies. And judging by the innumerable seconds, man was that pie good! Family Members had the opportunity to stick around all day and connect with each other and with staff over coffee, tea, and dessert. A consistent expression of gratitude overwhelmed us all as we thought to ourselves, “it’s the least we could do.”

Your support really helped us make a difference this spring. Our Family had a chance to articulate their own appreciation on paper. Each place-card provided space for

guests to write a personal thank-you. Responses ranged from simple truths such as “I was hungry, thank you” to an observation that the room was filled with “so much love.” One woman acknowledged the hardship in her life but went on to say, “You made my day. My life is good and I look forward to tomorrow.”

These moments of refuge and celebration are important for people living in chaos, poverty, and homelessness. It’s easy to feel defeated when you’re barely making ends meet for the month. That’s why meals like our Easter celebration are so critical. On this special day our guests may forget their trials and leave with the hope that life can be better than this. Each Family Member can leave having been reminded that they have incredible value and worth.



At Our Place, we communicate this sense of hope and belonging in all that we do: our many programs, our transitional housing, the ways in which our skilled team of outreach workers interacts with the Family. But on Easter, we had a chance to pause and offer a tangible, extra special reminder of this reality. We served 1,190 meals on Thursday, April 5th. We know that they left feeling satisfied, even stuffed. Our hope is that our Family Members left with hearts as full as their stomachs! 🏠



Family Focus:

Jerome

by Blythe Hutchcroft

Two weeks ago, Jerome moved into stable housing for the first time in years. He is three years clean and faces this transition with confidence, despite the fact that changes like this used to terrify him. “I’ve experienced tons of abandonment in similar situations,” he explains. But this time it’s different. “Everything I’ve done this time, I’ve worked very hard for. I’ve worked to connect with people, to build relationships – regardless of whether they’re professional or not – so that I can have a consistent foundation of support. I’m in a much better place now.”

It wasn’t always like this. Jerome’s life shifted for the worse in November 2010, when the recovery house he had been living in for three months kicked him out. He had nowhere to go. One and a half years clean from a long-time addiction, Jerome was truly homeless for the first time in his life. He was lonely, scared, and on the street. To illustrate this feeling, he asks me to imagine feeling totally alone and completely deserted. “Times that feeling by ten,” he says softly. Not sure where else to go, Jerome began coming to Our Place more frequently for daily meals, hygiene, and computer access. He was trying to hold it together while in and out of shelters, taking courses, and attending recovery meetings. But life was getting hard.

Leave a legacy – make a difference

PHILANTHROPY IS WITHIN EVERYONE’S REACH

Would you like to extend help to those in need for years to come? Planning to make a bequest from your estate is a great way to leave a life-changing legacy. It’s a way to continue to make a difference in the lives of Greater Victoria’s most vulnerable citizens. To learn more about the different ways you can leave a legacy call Don Evans, Executive Director of Our Place at 250-388-7112 Extension 239.

“I was starting to really feel what it was like to be homeless,” he says. “I’d been kicked out of recovery housing, I kept losing my bed at the shelter, and I knew that everywhere I slept would eventually meet an end.” In the face of constant uncertainty, Jerome craved stability – but couldn’t find it anywhere. To make things worse, at the end of February 2011, his 30-day stay at the shelter was coming up. Facing the cold reality of sleeping outside, Jerome was worried about slipping back into patterns of addiction.

Like many people, Jerome’s addiction was sparked by childhood trauma. He was abused when he was thirteen and this trauma shaped his early adulthood. It tainted his ability to trust and connect with others – until he decided to hook up with the Victoria Men’s Trauma Centre. Here he connected with counselors and others who had experienced similar trauma. These counselors, as well as his recovery and shelter communities, all encouraged Jerome to explore different avenues of recovery. “Part of my journey has been taking back the power that I lost at thirteen,” says Jerome. He is reclaiming his past by building a healthy foundation of relationships for his future.

Jerome says that he has learned a lot about the basic human need to be understood: a feeling of belonging that he has struggled with for many years. “I started taking courses in Empathetic Communication and I took great interest in it,” says Jerome. “So there I was: homeless, taking two courses, doing trauma therapy, going to recovery meetings, and trying to get a bed every night.” He eventually asked a worker at the shelter for help. After patiently listening to Jerome’s fears, this worker connected him with more stable, transitional housing.

Throughout this time, Jerome came to Our Place regularly. “After a while, I started to realize that there was more here

than what you might think,” he says. “I could go lots of places for food or showers, so I asked myself: why did I come here so often?”

Jerome says that Our Place played a significant and unique role in his journey of recovery and transition. “Outreach Workers like Jordan and Joel always had helpful suggestions,” he says. “But more important was the fact that they would just come talk to me.” Having experienced extraordinary abandonment, Jerome rarely felt safe with others; he had been taught to trust no one. Our Place gave him an opportunity to re-write that story and feel safe in meaningful friendship. Besides offering Jerome with daily showers, meals, and access to computers, Our Place provided Jerome with a sense that he was understood and belonged somewhere. “Our Place is the place where people have taken the time to get to know me,” he says. “Somebody was actually willing to care.”

Two falls ago, Jerome wandered into Our Place without knowing where he’d sleep that night. “Now I’ve got more things in my place right now than I’ve ever experienced in my lifetime!” he says, listing with gratitude things that most of us would consider common. “I have a bed. I have a desk. I have a kitchen table.” With that, Jerome says that his relationship with Our Place will shift. Now that he’s housed, Jerome says he’s excited to come back to Our Place to give instead of receive. “This is part of my recovery process,” he says. “It’s the idea that I’ve been given so much, and now it’s time to give back. Everyone deserves a break, just like I had here.”

“If Our Place wasn’t a part of my life,” he says, “I would feel it. I would really feel it. To quantify what this place has done? Who knows. But to qualify it? This place has filled me up.” 🏠

We asked you why you give and you responded!

HERE’S WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY:

“I see the need for ongoing support services for at risk groups. Our Place provides a service desperately needed and I want to contribute in a small way for a great cause. Thank you for all that you do!” – Todd

“Because we have gratitude for what we have, and compassion for those who have much less. – John and Marta

“Because I don’t like to see anyone hungry.” – Jedd

Program Focus:

Book Mobile

Every Tuesday morning, groups of curious and eager Family Members crowd the curb outside Our Place Society. They are waiting for the beloved Book Mobile. Each week at 10am, Madeleine Bakker and Avi Silberstein set up Literacy Victoria's travelling library right outside of Our Place. Boxes upon boxes of books – filled with everything from Nora Roberts to D.H. Lawrence – are placed on folding tables for Family Members to browse through

and borrow. Madeleine and Avi greet regular Book Mobilers with grins, hugs, and new recommendations. “Why do people rush out here instead of just getting their books elsewhere?” asks Madeleine as she embraces someone she hasn't seen for a while. “Well I think it's because of the relational aspect of this. People could go and get a book from inside, but then they'd miss out on this relational process.”

Avi Silberstein, staff at Greater Victoria Public Library, is always ready with a recommendation for our Family Members. Folks come back week after week to talk shop with these two experts. Madeleine says that Avi's breadth of literary knowledge draws people into this program – but it goes deeper than that. Conversations that might begin about Stephen King eventually morph into conversations about life, its trials, and its triumphs. This process puts a relational face to the service.

The benefits of the Book Mobile have a ripple effect, extending beyond these Tuesday morning exchanges to positively impact someone's week. For example, many people cannot access the Public library system due to fines or bans. Avi is always willing to help people restore their membership. “If we encourage others to read or go after something like getting their library card reinstated or hunting down part three of a trilogy they started,” says Madeleine, “then maybe that helps them to empower themselves to read more or gain more literacy skills.”

But many of these people already have high-functioning literacy skills. Though Madeleine and Avi love recommending authors, their savvy isn't always needed. Madeleine fondly recalls one humbling experience, in which a Family Member requested a philosopher that she herself did not know. Unable to help this reader on the spot, Madeleine was eventually able to locate a copy of the book. Each helped the other that day: our Family Member got his book while Madeleine got a thorough lesson in the philosophy of Henri Berkson. “People have all sorts of wonderfully specific interests,” she says, “And you wouldn't have any way of knowing unless you talk to them.” Like any demographic, our inner city community is a diverse group of people with a diverse range of pursuits. With this in mind the Book Mobile hunts for what is wanted, sometimes finding the most gorgeous hard covers to pass on to our Family. “To me, this is just the most fabulous way of recycling –” Madeleine comments. “And redistributing wealth!”





When asked why she sees a need for this program, Madeleine points out the joy that lights up our Family Members' faces when they find what they were looking for. "One time," says Madeleine, "a fellow said to me: 'Oh! Thank you! A new book is like a new pair of socks!' And I thought to myself, Wow. A new pair of socks for someone living in homelessness must be really something."

When one has only a few pairs of socks – if that – a comparison like this shows the level to which these books are appreciated.

Thank you, our faithful donor, for helping us provide the space for this to happen. 🏠

Donate your Shoppers Optimum Points Today!

Help Our Place Society purchase much needed toiletries and first aid supplies for Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens by donating your Shoppers Drug Mart Optimum Points. For more information on how you can make a difference call Tracy at 250-388-7112 Extension 259.

Volunteer with Our Place

Volunteering with Our Place is an excellent way to give back, gain valuable skills, and feel great while doing it. There are so many ways to help us make a difference. You can start by signing up for a volunteer orientation today. During these sessions, prospective volunteers are provided with a tour of our facility, which gives us an opportunity to show you (rather than simply tell you) what we do. To learn more about volunteering with Our Place, or to register for an orientation, contact Rodrigo at 250-388-7112 ext 243 or volunteer@ourplacesociety.com

"I've been cleaning showers down in the basement for 2 years now because I truly do like it. And I'm not a fan of cleaning - you should see my apartment sometimes. I have made some really strong friendships with other volunteers. Through getting to know Family Members, I've learned a huge lesson I hope I never forget: there's no "they" or "homeless," there's just people and lives and stories."
- Julia K, 21, Hygiene and Art volunteer.

Sponsor-A-Breakfast

Many of us rely on a healthy breakfast to kick-start our day. But what if you didn't have a roof over your head or a kitchen to dine in? This is a reality for many of the people we serve at Our Place Society. And now, your organization can do something about it.

If your employer wants to encourage teamwork while giving back to the community, we've got just the thing for you. With our Sponsor - A - Breakfast program, Our Place Society provides an opportunity for your team to do just that while having fun at the same time. The time commitment is minimal but the rewards are immeasurable. You simply fund the project and show up at 6:45. Let us do the rest!

Breakfast Options:

Porridge & Fruit/Coffee \$300.00

Pancakes/Sausages/Coffee \$375.00

Scrambled Eggs/Ham/Coffee \$450.00

Our Place Society staff will prepare the breakfast and your staff (2 - 30 people) will join us from 6:45 - 8:30am to serve the meal.

Let's work together to bring hope and belonging to those who need it most.

For further details on how your organization can get involved and make a meaningful difference in our community contact Tracy at 250-388-7112 Extension 259. 🏠



Thank You

This Easter, nine different faith communities joined us to provide meals on Good Friday and Easter Monday. This incredible response ensured that we were able to partner with you, our wider community, to serve meals on days that we would otherwise be closed. But you didn't stop there! Local choir "Sing Your Joy" joined us for Easter Monday dinner. They surprised our Family by breaking out in song mid-meal. That day we all left filled with food and song.

Because of you, our Family Members were able to rest easy, knowing that they wouldn't be without food for the long weekend. We want to extend an extra-special thanks to St. John the Divine, Lutheran Church of the Cross, Christ Church Cathedral, Chinese Presbyterian, St. Aidan's United, Congregation Emanu-El's Avodah Group, Cordova Bay United, First Metropolitan United, Oak Bay United, and Sing Your Joy. You made Easter last all weekend long! 🏠