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Executive Director's Message

by Don Evans

We celebrate summer in many ways at Our Place. We mark the summer solstice with National Aboriginal Day on June 21. We are grateful to the people of the Songhees Nation, keepers of the land upon which we reside, and the long-standing cooperative relationship with one of our founding partners, the United Church of Canada. Plans for celebration include prayers, drumming, dancing and a special feast for all. Please feel welcome to join us.

Another favourite summer activity returns with our annual summer softball games at Heywood Field in Beacon Hill Park. Check our Calendar of Events on our website at www.ourplacesociety.com for dates and times. The public is welcome to attend these games as spectators or participants. A barbecue will be offered during the games which is also open to all at no cost.

Weekend openings for lunches began six months ago and as of June 2nd, with the generous support of the United Way and donors like you, we are able to extend our hours on Sundays to 4 p.m. offering access for family members to showers, clothing, snacks at our Nutrition Bar, recreation and entertainment spaces, a computer lab, as well as skills training. With your continued support, we hope to provide more programs and services for our family members in the months ahead.

While summer activities help us reach out to Our Place family members, the general public, our generous donors and

volunteers, we also continue with a strong focus on cost-efficiency for our day-to-day operations and behind-the-scenes activities that keep Our Place Society strong and growing. Great strides have been made in recent months as we work together to create a more organized and focused approach to everything we do. We have eliminated our deficit and started our new fiscal year on stable footing, which is a major achievement in support of our much-needed services.

“ Reflecting on my first year at Our Place, I have developed a tremendous amount of love and respect for the family members.”

We have fine-tuned a three-year strategic plan out of which we have further developed priorities for new programming, expanded hours and financial sustainability while also building a stronger presence in our community. Our process, always inclusive, has generated good discussions and

many wonderful ideas from across our work teams, proving that we have an enthusiastic crew ready to move forward in an efficient and productive manner. We are also holding meetings with our family members to ensure we listen and act upon their most viable ideas and encourage them to make suggestions as they come up.

Reflecting on my first year at Our Place, I have developed a tremendous amount of love and respect for the family members. I have come to know them better every day. I have gained many new insights and received the gift of friendship from just having engaged with them on a regular basis.

Further, I continue to be amazed by the generosity of our community. Thank you to all who donate their time, money and gifts-in-kind to Our Place. We could not do this work without you.

Warm regards,
Don Evans, Executive Director



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Easter Meal - 2013

More than 750 family members joined us for a delicious meal this past Easter.

Brian, our Manager of Food Services, created a classic menu which featured roast turkey, gravy, mashed potato, bread stuffing, mixed veggies, plus cranberry sauce, of course, and pumpkin pie for dessert, as well as tea and coffee.

A special thank you goes out to our 30 volunteers, many of whom are well-known public figures and politicians, who served and assisted with clean-up. Carole James (shown here in the background) was kind enough to work two shifts!

Shoghi gave us his birthday presents.

Friends and family make a donation in lieu of gifts.

Meet Shoghi.

Last March, Shoghi invited his friends to his eighth birthday party but instead of gifts he asked that they bring donations for Our Place Society instead. Shoghi and his friends raised \$250. Now, Shoghi is helping his dad sell handmade earrings and they have agreed to donate all proceeds to us this summer.

Shoghi's father sent us the following note –

Shoghi says, "Thank you for the message you gave me. It makes me happy that I made you happy. You are very welcome for the gift. That was a good birthday present to me." For me, thank you so much for all the hard work you are doing. There are many outside of Our Place who appreciate it, too.

In our religion, Baha'u'llah says, "To give and to be generous are attributes of mine." Shoghi is growing so beautiful in his sense of generosity and I am very proud that he chose to give the money he raised to Our Place. Thank you for showering him with such love. It encourages him on his path in life.

With love and prayers,

Mead



Thank you, Shoghi and Mead, from all of us at Our Place!



Sandy speaks with a member of the Our Place family. “The drop-in floor is like a large living room for the downtown community,” says Sandy, “an extended family of people living in poverty.”

A day in the life: Outreach Team

It’s 7 a.m. and people are lining up for breakfast. Our family of more than 1,000 people drop in for all sorts of needs be it meals, to use the phone or help with transportation. Others need blankets or dry clothes. And some just want to come in out of the cold. Our population is two-thirds male, one-third female, one-third First Nations. Some have jobs, often low-paying, and subsidize their living expenses through the services we offer.

There’s no place quite like Our Place. We think of the people we serve as an extended family of people who are homeless or living in poverty. Our Place is their home with many of the same challenges and joys of any family, only more so.

Creating a safe, supportive, welcoming ‘home’ in Victoria’s downtown core is a big job. We strive to find stability and wellness for these individuals many of whom have diverse needs: addictions, mental health, trauma, loneliness, isolation.

On a regular day, our Outreach team of four women and four men circulate, assist and direct those individuals needing help. Today, a volunteer is offering acupuncture sessions and

LifeCycles is handing out plants for residents. The Outreach team greets people by name, provides information, helps with various kinds of paperwork and setting up appointments. We also help with computers and letter-writing, coordinate minor medical care and, most importantly, we listen. Attention can be a deeply gratifying gift to the people we serve.

Two Outreach workers oversee the hygiene department where anyone can get a shower, clean clothes and a haircut. When school is in, foot and dental care services are provided courtesy of the University of Victoria School of Nursing and Camosun College dental hygiene students.

Members of the Outreach team also support family members through crisis situations which may involve liaison with our Housing team, as well as support with health, finances and relationships. We celebrate birthdays once a month with cake, ice cream and recognition. There have been several marriages over the years and many success stories where family members improve their health, secure employment and find a home to call their own.

“Members of the Outreach team also support family members through crisis situations which may involve liaison with our Housing team, as well as support with health, finances and relationships.”

There are losses, too, as poverty can be the parent to illness and self-harm. We honour those who pass away with memorial services inclusive of all faiths.

This morning I see two men, both with schizophrenia, both tortured by delusions, both wanting to get into a facility where they say they will feel safe.

One shows me slashes, fresh wounds, and cries, asking, “Do you think God will forgive me for doing this?”

Outreach work is stressful and intense. To the same degree, it is truly rewarding. Each Outreach worker brings an unusually diverse range of training and expertise to the team. Half began as volunteers. Our addictions worker, Kym, spent three years as a volunteer. Now people are referred to her for help from every agency in the community.

For Jessica, housing is her single, most important focus. “That’s the starting point. It’s pretty hard to improve your life if you’re spending all your energy getting your basic needs met.” About one-third of the people we serve are homeless.

The Outreach team, led by Jordan Cooper, upholds our reputation for being the last place to bar people in this community and, when barring is necessary, it is for the

shortest period of time. “This is their place and we want them to be here,” says Jordan. “Sometimes we have to set limits for behavior but we want them back as soon as possible.”

The two lead Outreach workers are Roman and Sandy. We’ve been serving the Our Place family for a decade now. The best part of the job, according to Roman, is “the daily sharing of our family members’ lives, finding out what’s going on with them, laughing and joking.”

At day’s end, I meet a well-dressed woman in her 50s who came to Our Place from Ontario. She tells me her story, excited by the opportunity she sees here. She tells me on her first visit she had a chance to have someone listen to her, one-on-one. She found

healing with our acupuncture program, joined an art class and a women’s circle.

Like so many other people in need, especially those who are hard to reach, she found opportunity, acceptance and unconditional love at Our Place, which are the values we embrace everyday.

Next issue, we will report on our Housing team and how they work closely with Outreach to support those individuals in our community who are the hardest to house.

“ We celebrate birthdays. There have been several marriages over the years and many success stories where family members improve their health, secure employment and find a home to call their own.”

The Outreach team at Our Place starts their day with a group meeting to share with one another the needs of family members and to set priorities for their busy work day.





“At first, Shawn thought the idea of upgrading his education was unattainable,” says Bob, Facilities Manager at Our Place. “Reflecting on how far he had come was the catalyst for him to take that next major step.”

Family Focus: Shawn

“My dad was a long-standing member of the Victoria street community,” says Shawn, 29, as he sips a coffee at the end of his work day. “Yeah, he died on the stairs there behind the Empress. He had a heart attack and an alcoholic seizure.”

Even though the paramedics resuscitated Shawn’s father, Daryl died three days later in hospital. He was 47 years old.

Shawn looks down at the tattoo on his right arm. There, his father’s name and the year of his death are written in an elegant script of black ink: Daryl 2009.

“I made a promise to him years before that when he was gone, I would quit.” Finally confronted by his father’s death, Shawn had a tough time honouring his promise.

His father grew up in a world of extreme addiction and mental illness. He worked occasionally but relied on his wife to be the family provider. “He drank everything. He drank rubbing alcohol. It’s super cheap, eh, and it has a high alcohol content.”

Plus his dad was a violent man, especially when he was intoxicated. “I was used to it,” says Shawn. “If I was hanging with Dad, then I was drinking and fighting, too.” Shawn recalls the abuse he withstood from when he was a kid. “I remember getting punched from when I was about four years old.”

Even so, Shawn came to understand his father’s drunken rages, a despair stemming from a life without a father of his own and a drug-addicted mother with psychological problems who simply was not there to raise her two boys and two girls. “Often it was my dad who held the family together. He was the eldest.” But his father and his siblings were eventually placed into a

boarding school where he was subsequently sexually abused.

Shawn grew up with a life of drugs and alcohol and violence. And, like his father, he began using, too. “I’d be living with my mom, smoking weed, drinking, skipping school. I got into alcohol and Ecstasy in a big way.” He held a variety of jobs, only with the intention of saving enough money to buy more drugs and drink. “It

got to the point where I was consuming more daily and couldn’t keep a job. Not even day labour.”

Then came Shawn’s turning point.

About four months after his father had passed, Shawn went to Port Renfrew with his mother, sister, nephew and a best

“ I was scared. Kym, one of the Outreach workers, helped me. I told her what I wanted to do, that I wanted to go to Miracle Valley like my dad but I was going to complete the program.”

friend to scatter Daryl's ashes. "It's such a beautiful place. My father loved it there," says Shawn. Once they had said their final farewells, Shawn's mother and sister confronted him about his promise to get clean.

"It was an intervention," says Shawn. "They had planned this."

"I felt something kinda break inside of me," he recalls. "They were right. I couldn't quit on my own. I needed help."

And so, as Shawn explains, he became willing.

"I'd been thinking about quitting a lot. I knew about Our Place because dad used to go there. At first, it was the Open Door – I was hanging out with him way back then. We even came up with a scheme to go to Miracle Valley and sober up there together." Daryl did go to the treatment centre, run by the Salvation Army of BC, but he did not complete.

When Shawn came to Our Place intent on sobriety, things were different this time.

"I was scared. Kym, one of the Outreach workers, helped me. I told her what I wanted to do, that I wanted to go to Miracle Valley like my dad but I was going to complete the program." Kym convinced Shawn to go into the three-day detox program at the Royal Jubilee Hospital prior to treatment to better prepare for a successful recovery. He followed her advice. "That was June 10," he says with pride, "my clean date."

After detox, he completed the three-month treatment program, moved to a recovery house in Sooke, joined Narcotics Anonymous and found a sponsor. He would seek out day jobs and, if nothing was available, he'd come to Our Place. Bob, Facilities Manager, offered him volunteer work and, in time, paid work.

"There was lots of support there. People noticed I had changed, saying, "Hey, you're looking good, man. Stick with it."

Bob knew Shawn's father and understood Shawn's history. Repeatedly concussed from passing out on the street, getting hit by a car, his violent upbringing all contributed to a brain injury.

"Bob said, you know, you may qualify for this disability funding. He encouraged me to go to school, to get a trade. So, I made that leap and applied for college." Yes, it was hard, he admits, but he successfully completed the Sheet Metal and Metal Fabrication certification program and now works full time for a major aircraft construction company in their sheet metal shop.

"He had the willingness to do whatever he had to do to change," says Bob. "That saved him. We just gave him the platform to recover."

Asked why he stood by his father in spite of the abuse, Shawn shrugs. "You only get one dad in your lifetime. And I stayed in that world because it was the world I knew, I grew up in that world. Dad would bring these men home with him, his friends from the street. That's who I was then. But that's not who I am today."

There are triggers he must face which come up when he gets uncomfortable or when he is around people who are using. But Shawn has found a way to sidestep temptation.

"When I get the itch to use," he smiles, "I just look at this tattoo on my right arm."



This photo of Shawn's father, Daryl, hangs on the Memorial Wall at Our Place. Daryl died of complications associated with alcoholism at age 47.

Are you willing?

Life Ring now meets at Our Place on Sundays from 1 to 2 p.m. This is an alcohol and drug support group open to anyone willing to address their problematic substance use. Various approaches to sober living are discussed. The main purpose of the group is to create the right environment to reinforce each person's choice to stay clean and sober. Life Ring is an ongoing "workshop" where individuals build their own recovery plan. Drop in or, to learn more, visit www.liferingcanada.org.

Narcotics Anonymous meets at Our Place on Sundays from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

Volunteer Profile:

Janet

"I've been a volunteer with Our Place for four years," says Janet who enjoys helping out at reception and in both kitchens.

"Two months after I retired, the only person I spoke to for four consecutive days was my husband and that's when I realized I needed to get out of Dodge," she laughs.

Janet previously worked as a travel agent for more than 20 years. She has experienced first hand the incredible changes that have taken place in the travel industry and she also enjoyed many of the benefits, like travelling the world at bargain prices. Mother to four, her kids are grown with a first grandchild due soon. Retired and an empty-nester, Janet knew she wanted to volunteer and tried donating her time at a few places before she settled on Our Place.

"When I first came here, I was nervous because I expected the family members would be unhappy people," she recalls. "I found the exact opposite to be true." The people are fantastic, she says, emphasizing the humour, kindness and thoughtfulness of both family members and staff.

"As I work in three different areas, I have come to know many of the staff. I have never worked in a paid or unpaid position with such an incredible group of people."

She has come to know many family members by name, as well as people who regularly drop off donations. One of her favourite tasks while working reception is to call people and thank them for giving to us.

"People really appreciate the acknowledgment and are often surprised that we make time to call. We receive such amazing gifts, especially at Christmas and Easter, so it's quite fun to make those phone calls."



Janet also enjoys getting together after hours with the other volunteers she's come to know over the years. "There's a core group of us who have volunteered together for some time and we've become good friends." Janet says they get together for their own social gatherings throughout the year.

"To me, volunteering at Our Place is just like a job. There is the same commitment and the same sense of responsibility. And I enjoy the work as it helps define my week," says Janet, adding that the work has also helped redefine her appreciation for all that is good in her life.

"What I once thought was an issue is not such a big deal anymore," she says. Her father passed away when she was a child and so Janet and her brother were raised by her mom. "As difficult as that situation was for me and my family, we always had food in the fridge," she says. "I realize now, after working here, that I'm so fortunate in so many ways—to have a home, a healthy family, and good friends."

“As I work in three different areas, I have come to know many of the staff. I have never worked in a paid or unpaid position with such an incredible group of people.”



VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

Our Place volunteers are the life-blood of our organization.

The commitment we request of you is minimal yet the rewards are immeasurable. If you wish to commit to a weekly volunteer shift, please contact Rodrigo, Our Place Volunteer Coordinator, at rodrigok@ourplacesociety.com to register for volunteer orientation on any one of the following dates: June 27, July 11 and 25, Aug. 8 and 22, Sept. 5 and 19.

Things we need

Can you help us with some of these much-needed items? You can drop off your donation at the Our Place reception desk, 919 Pandora Avenue. An updated list of needs is posted on our website. For more information, please call Tracy at 250-388-7112 ext 259.

Men's and Women's Clothing



As our population of family members is two-thirds male, we are always in need of more men's clothing. Jeans, jerseys, jackets and t-shirts are very popular. Used garments and accessories are fine provided they are clean and in good condition. Underwear, socks and shoes are especially welcome items for the men in our family. New and packaged socks and underwear, please. Footwear of all kinds - runners, boots, casual shoes and sandals.

Blankets and Sleeping Bags



We can always use preferably new or gently-used, freshly laundered sheets and blankets to support our 45 Transitional Housing suites. Family members often request blankets, too, if they are living on the street. Sleeping bags are also very popular but must be carefully laundered before we can accept. We are fully stocked on pillows, thanks.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables



We welcome food donations from grocers and growers alike. We work with numerous charitable organizations, too, to coordinate food donations of all kinds. But if you have extra, think of us!

A special request: please consider allocating a financial gift that we could put towards the items we need most. This allows us to take full advantage of our purchasing power with the many supportive suppliers we currently work with who offer us bulk discounts.

Toiletries



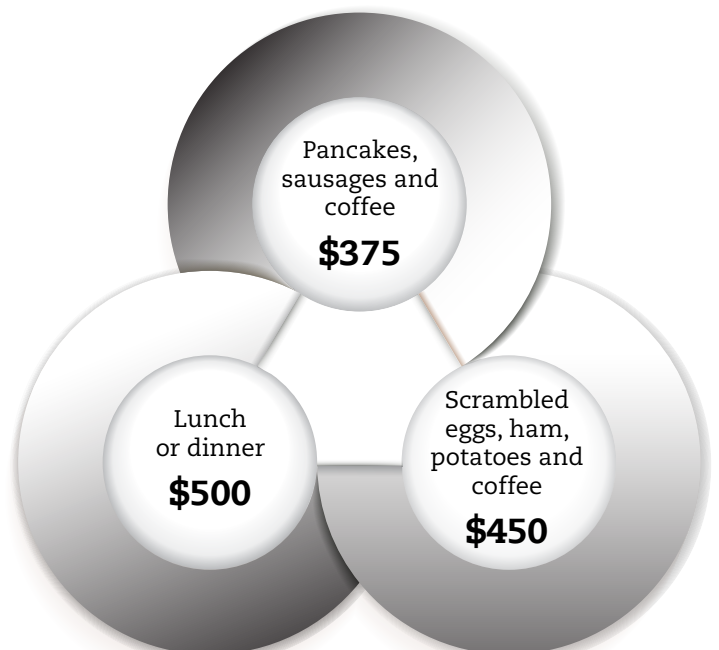
Toothpaste, toothbrushes, floss, deodorant, razors and feminine hygiene products are in high demand. We already receive shampoo, conditioner and soaps from the local hotel community.

Sponsor a Breakfast

Help us nourish our family members with the gift of a morning meal. Or sponsor a lunch or dinner. If you take care of the cost, we can prepare the meal. Your team, or your family and friends, can also volunteer to help serve, if you wish. We receive requests from community groups, churches and businesses, as well as individuals wanting to mark a birthday or another special occasion in a meaningful way.

Get in touch with us to select your date and confirm your donation and, if you choose, we'll send you the details to orient your team to volunteer. Learn more by contacting Aidan at aidanh@ourplacesociety.com or call him at 250-388-7112 ext 259.

For more info on who is sponsoring what meals when, visit our Twitter and Facebook pages.



Costs to serve 300 people.



Everyone wins at our softball games! Fun, friendly, good sports, cheering each other on, with a delicious barbecue, and welcome to all.

Softball is back!

Fridays – July 5 and 19, August 9 and 23

Our Place Softball Games + BBQs

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Heywood Field – Beacon Hill Park

You can play. You can watch. You can cheer on your favourite team mate. You can volunteer. And you can stay for lunch and get to know our many players. This is a casual, fun softball game where everyone is encouraged to get involved in some way. Help us carry on our softball tradition, now in its sixth year. Equipment provided.

For more info on our activities, check our Calendar of Events online at www.ourplacesociety.com/events

A special thank you to the Victoria HarbourCats for their support in coordinating a Glove Drive for our softball players!

Welcome Julianne, our new Chaplain

Providing daily drop-in spiritual and pastoral care to all.



Newly-appointed Chaplain Julianne Kasmer has the corner office in the drop-in area on the main floor of Our Place and is available daily for spiritual and pastoral care.

A mother and grandmother, Julianne is also an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada and has served congregations on Denman Island and in Cumberland prior to coming to Our Place. Her extensive experience of more than 20 years includes working on various faith and justice issues, especially those matters relating to residential school survivors and reconciliation with First Nations people.

“My hope and dream for Our Place is for this ministry to include a First Nations spiritual leader to enhance opportunities for spiritual growth,” says Julianne. “I believe deep listening, prayer and reflection are the keys to spiritual care.”

Julianne led her first memorial service last March for a family member. The event was very ecumenical – meaning the service was informal and inclusive of all faiths – with participation from Pastor Tom Oshiro from Mustard Seed, Nathan Swartz from the Salvation Army, as well as people from Rock Bay Landing and friends from around the community.

Julianne also coordinates the Grief and Loss Support Group in partnership with Victoria Hospice. Anyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one and is in need of help to address feelings of profound grief and despair is welcome to drop in at any of the Grief and Loss Support Group sessions led by Lucie Mattar of the Victoria Hospice Society. These group meetings are held every other Thursdays at 1 p.m. for confidential sharing and compassionate listening. All are welcome.

Summer meetings are scheduled for June 13 and 27, July 11 and 25, Aug. 22, Sept. 5 and 19.

Giving in creative ways

1 Leave a legacy – make a difference.

Philanthropy is within everyone's reach.

Estate planning now can be of great help to our organization today. Imagine how your will can serve as a lasting legacy that could make a significant difference in the lives of Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. Learn more about our Angels of Hope legacy program by calling Don at 250-388-7112 ext 239.

2 Donate your points!

We accept Shoppers Drug Mart Optimum points.

Help us purchase much-needed toiletries and first aid supplies for our family members by donating your Shoppers Optimum Points. Contact Tracy at 250-388-7112 ext 259.

3 Team Building + Employee Engagement

Sponsor a breakfast, serve a meal, meet our family.

Want to encourage a higher purpose through teamwork and giving back to your community with your organization's employees? Our Sponsor-a-Breakfast (or lunch, dinner, barbecue) program provides employers (schools, church groups and non-profit organizations too!) with an opportunity for employee engagement and team development while having fun at the same time. For details on how your organization can get involved and make a meaningful difference in our community, contact Aidan at 250-388-7112 ext 259.

Must love pets

Our Place staff respond to overwhelming need for pet supports. Pets remain a major part of many of our family members' lives.

Vets for Pets is a free clinic held on the second Thursday of every month from 2 to 4 p.m. in the courtyard at Our Place where volunteer veterinarians check the health and well-being of our family members' pets. This program is provided at no charge.

The Sooke Animal Food And Rescue Society – visit www.safars.org – provides pet food hampers and attends the Vets For Pets session to also support family members with pets. This group also helps us maintain a Pet Food Bank at Our Place. Each food hamper contains enough pet food for a week of healthy eating for a cat or dog. They also supply leashes, pet toys and other items that pet owners may need to keep their animals happy and healthy.





Here, members of the Shelbourne Street Church of Christ youth group with Pastor Brian and our Chef Dave in the middle after helping with meal service at Our Place.

Youth group reaches out to family members

Volunteer Victoria collaborates with Our Place Society to support request.

A group of teen volunteers wanted to help Victoria's less fortunate citizens in an extraordinary way. The youth group with the Shelbourne Street Church of Christ didn't want to just donate time or money, they wanted to meet and talk with disadvantaged people to better understand their needs.

The youth group's unique proposal posed a challenge for Volunteer Victoria staff because youth under 19 years of age are restricted from such facilities. Inspired by the passion of the teens, Volunteer Victoria staff collaborated with the Our Place Society to make their remarkable experience possible.

Jordan Smale, 16, spent a Friday night visiting with family members at Our Place. "It opened up our eyes and helped us to understand these individuals better," Jordan said. "I thought it was amazing that we could do that."

The experience inspired the group to host a winter clothing and toiletries drive for family members. They also made dessert (a rare treat) and volunteered to serve.

Shelbourne Street Church of Christ Associate Minister, Daniel Patstone, chaperoned the youth during their visit and said it

was a "fantastic" opportunity for the teens to put a face to the issue of homeless people. "Volunteer Victoria introduced us and kick-started that relationship and the youth group wants that relationship to continue," Daniel said. "To see them take that on at this age fills me with hope."

“ Volunteer Victoria introduced us and kick-started that relationship and the youth group wants that relationship to continue.”

Julia-Anne Cameron, Youth Program Coordinator at Volunteer Victoria, helped facilitate the teens' experience. "This speaks highly to the agencies involved," Julia-Anne said. "It gave the youth perspective on this stigmatized and marginalized population of our city, which was a truly amazing and worthwhile experience."

Thank you!

We are truly grateful to everyone who gives to Our Place, who cares about our family members enough to donate their time, their money, their attention. We value every contribution we receive. And we share our blessings with those who need it most.



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