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Photo by Derek Ford

We thank Tech Web Direct for donating resources to print this full colour newsletter



Hope and Belonging

Executive Director's Message

When the sun shines brightly on our Island home, it's easy to forget the challenges of a cold and wet winter. This is especially true when I think about our exciting plans for the future.

Winter brought with it a series of challenges that tested the mettle of our staff, volunteers and supporters. We became a vital part of the province's Extreme Weather Response program, and we saw demand on our meal services increase by a staggering 30 percent.

But here's the exciting part — Our Place staff, volunteers and supporters responded magnificently. I felt a swelling of pride and joy at how everyone came together for the sole purpose of helping Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens.

This tells me that Our Place has a solid and secure foundation upon which to continue building. From volunteers to kitchen staff, custodial, security, outreach and transitional housing workers, managers, leadership and our board of directors — our collective vision is unified and clear.

And with a stable base and clear vision comes the ability to continue to implement the exciting steps in the board's strategic priorities for the future of Our Place.

We've already made great strides by increasing our programs and services, and bringing together an impassioned leadership team with the skillset needed to provide long-



term sustainability. Our main goal continues to be the expansion of our hours — especially on evenings and weekends.

But we want to do more. We are seeing an increase in the number of seniors coming through our doors for meals, companionship and to access programs and services. We're also seeing an increase in the number of young people who often come out of the foster system and have few places to turn.

We're committed to doing all we can to help, and thanks to your support, it is possible.

Warm Regards,

Don Evans
Executive Director

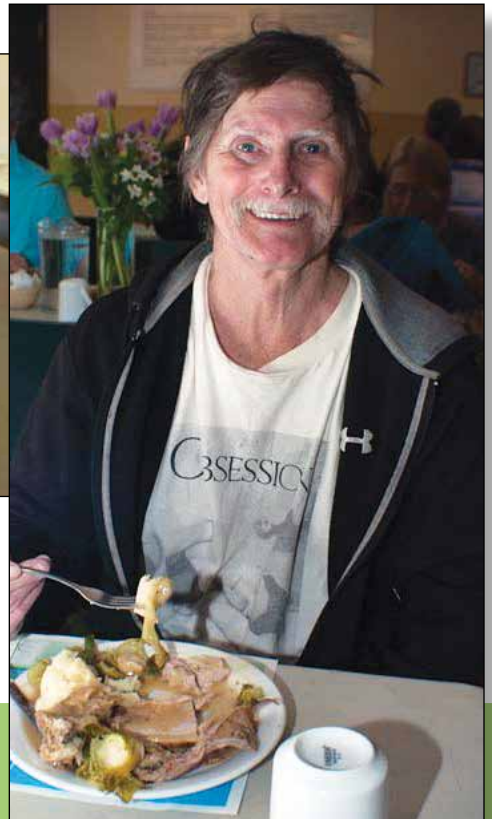


THANK YOU!

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 and services offered over the past year would not have been possible without the generosity of Our Place volunteers and supporters. Thank you!



GOOD FRIDAY: Congregation Emanu-El & the Ismaili Muslim Youth came together to co-sponsor lunch at Our Place on Good Friday.



Our Recent Events

Hungry Hearts

Our Place hosted a brand new fundraiser called **Hungry Hearts** that we hope will become a very popular annual event. The idea was simple: ask a few of Victoria's top chefs to create a unique twist on our lunch staple of soup and a sandwich, and then invite the public to Mix, Mingle, Laugh and Savour — all the while raising money to make a difference in the lives of our region's most vulnerable. The debut event presented by **PwC** and held in The Atrium — donated for the evening by **Jawl Properties** — was certainly a reason to celebrate. The chefs — **Peter Zambri** of

Zambri's, **Kunal Ghose** of Red Fish Blue Fish, **Garrett Schack** of Vista 18, **Castro Boateng** of Castro Boateng Fine Catering, **Patrick Lynch** of Foo Asian Street Food (pictured top left), and **Michael Williams** of Country Grocer — stunned the hungry crowd with their delicious gourmet delights. And while Castro Boateng won the most votes for his African-themed combo, the real winners were everyone who had a taste of all the marvelous creations. Emceed by CHEK TV's **Dana Hutchings**, musical entertainment was provided by a wonderful jazz trio from the Victoria Conservatory of Music and local singer/songwriter **Steph Macpherson**. Attendees enjoyed a silent auction, while renowned philanthropist **Eric Charman** led the live auction in his own inimitable style. Thanks to the generosity of everyone involved, the end result was a \$78,000 windfall for Our Place that couldn't have been more timely. Watch our website for tickets to next year's savory soiree.

Easter Meal

Our Place hosted our annual Easter Meal with the support of our fabulous donors, volunteers and local politicians. Nearly 1,000 people showed up to enjoy a family feast of turkey, mashed potatoes, steamed vegetables, stuffing and gravy. For dessert, we served up slices of pumpkin pie. You can view a special video — created and donated by Cedarwood Productions — on our website or our YouTube Channel at: www.youtube.com/user/OurPlaceSociety/

To find out more about events, visit ourplacesociety.com and click on *Upcoming Events*.



< **JazzSoul:** Daniel Lapp, left, and special guests — including our choir director, the inimitable Louise Rose — performed a benefit concert for Our Place organized by the First Metropolitan United Church on Feb. 28. The crowd enjoyed a night of amazing music, and helped raise over \$6,000. We don't know who the surprise photobomber on the right is ;)

Our Family

Al's Story

When you first meet Al, you are taken in by his eyes: clear, strong and focused. But those eyes also contain a vulnerability that tells you he is someone who has lived rough, faced difficult decisions, and known pain.

Born and raised in Victoria, Al's life was turned upside down 11 years ago when he lost his job as a security guard. He admits that he shares responsibility for the loss as, "I was stubborn. They wanted rid of me and I gave them the excuse."

Unable to find a new job, combined with personal troubles at home, Al ended up on the street. A short time later, his brother, Tom, lost both his job and the place where he was living, and joined Al in the vacant doorways of downtown Victoria.

"I couldn't stay in the shelters," says Al. "The snoring and stench of feet was too much. I'd rather sleep on the street."

Al and his brother staked a nightly claim in a spot with an overhanging roof that helped shield them from the snow and rain.

"It has its ups and downs," says Al. "Eighty to ninety percent of the people you meet are good, but every day has its challenges."

One of those challenges was finding a safe place to stash his sleeping bag and extra clothes. "No matter how well you hid it, someone always sniffed it out and stole it," he says.

The one bright spot in Al's day was Our Place. "I'd show up every morning for breakfast," he says. "It was the first place I turned to when I had nowhere else to go."

The one thing that Al always had going for him was his work ethic. "I don't ask anyone for anything," says Al. "I would get up at six in the morning to go bottling, and was usually on my bike until ten at night. Living on the street is boring. You have to keep busy."

Collecting bottles around Victoria also gave Al a sense of purpose as neighbourhood residents came to know his schedule, and would look out for him hauling bottles and cans on his bicycle.

"Sometimes I would be so loaded down with bottles that people would stop to take my picture," Al says with a minimal grin. "I even got a police escort to the bottle depot once after a cop saw me piled high with 780 bottles. It was just two blocks, but I'll always remember that."

LEAVE A LEGACY

BECOME AN ANGEL OF HOPE TODAY

Stories like Al's are common at Our Place. Please consider becoming an 'Angel of Hope' and ensure your compassion will make a lasting difference in the lives of hurting people. By naming Our Place Society in your bequest plans, you become an Angel of Hope for years to come. For more information call Laura Walsh, Director of Development, 250.388.7122 ext 231 or visit our website at <http://ourplacesociety.com>.



Another memory he'll cherish is the generosity of some of the friends he made on the route.

"One family gave me a new sleeping bag when they heard mine got stolen," he says. "Another stuck an envelope with forty-five bucks inside into their recycling bin at Christmas. I tried to return it, but they insisted I keep it."

Al enjoyed bottling because it allowed him to be his own boss, which was a better fit for his personality. But Al also knew he needed to get his life back on track.

A father of two, who lost his own father at 14, Al wanted a more stable life. That goal became even more important

when he took on responsibility for his two young grandchildren.

Always keeping busy, Al was spending more time at Our Place by volunteering in the hygiene area and cleaning up the courtyard. So when the Manager of Housing, John Sherratt, heard Al was ready to make a change, he suggested Al apply through the Coordinated Access to Supportive Housing (CASH) program for supportive housing.

Shortly after moving into one of our 45 transitional units, Al applied and was hired for a custodial position at Our Place, where he has been working part-time for the last four months.

"It's really helped my self-esteem," says Al. "And got my morals back on track."

Having lived on the street for over a decade, Al knows he still has a way to go before he can return to sustainable, independent living. But the staff at Our Place is there to help him succeed by providing more employment skills and planning his progress to less-supported housing.

And as one look in Al's eyes will tell you, he's too strong to fail.



Barrister and Solicitor Michael Evans-Hatch offers a free legal clinic in the Our Place Drop-In Centre. It has quickly become a popular service for our family members. Every week, Michael offers general legal advice, including: manoeuvring the court system; help with reviewing and completing legal documents; and providing overviews of legal proceedings. Michael also represents our family members in court when they need it, and he does it all pro bono. Thanks, Michael.

FREE LEGAL CLINIC

NEW AT OUR PLACE!

Our Programs

Mental Health & Addiction



Matt McCoy has one rule when it comes to mental health — we're not allowed to call him Bones.

And because he's such a lean figure of a man, it can be difficult not to go for the obvious *Star Trek* joke. Although, truth be told, he's also so easy going that he probably wouldn't mind the occasional slip-up.

Bones, *err*, Matt is one of the newest staff members of Our Place, having joined us in the middle of March after a several year stint at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. While in Edmonton, Matt worked in the short-term psychiatric unit that dealt with some of the most severe cases of street-entrenched mental health and addiction problems.

Upon arriving at Our Place as the Mental Health and Addiction Clinician, his first order of business was to create an anonymous survey for the residents of the transitional housing units in order to better involve the residents in the planning process for their futures.

"It's a complicated bunch," he says. "Every individual is a unique case with his or her own set of issues, problems and challenges. While one person may need help with addiction issues, another may need better

life skills, education, or coping strategies for anxiety, stress or trauma."

The most eye-opening revelation of the survey showed that: "Substance use has decreased across the board just by having a safe place to live."

Matt adds, "Security and safety are definitely two of the main positives that we hear from our residents. Having a door that can be locked is a huge step forward when you've been living on the street."

Matt also has regular office hours in the Drop-in Centre where he finds Our Place's policy of "inclusiveness and engagement" so valuable in building trust with our most vulnerable family members.

He's quick to praise the diversity of the Outreach and Transitional Housing Support workers for maintaining that valuable philosophy of belonging.

"Change can't be hurried," he says.

"Remember, some of the people who walk through our doors have 50 years of trauma, abuse, addiction or mental health problems. There is no quick fix for that, but we can help the healing process to begin."



VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE THE LIFE-BLOOD OF OUR ORGANIZATION.

BECOME PART OF A DYNAMIC TEAM OF COMPASSIONATE PEOPLE assisting Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. Volunteer orientation sessions happen on the second Thursday of 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 our Manager of Volunteers Jennifer Copley at 250-388-7112 Ext. 243.



John Ducker, far right, serving a meal at Our Place with members of VicPD

Our Volunteers

Did you know: The Board of Directors that oversees the stewardship of Our Place is made up of volunteers?

JOHN DUCKER, former Deputy Chief of the Victoria Police Department, is one of the board's newest members. We decided to ask him a few questions.

OP: *What inspired you to volunteer and serve on the board?*

JD: I was thoroughly impressed with the board's commitment to the cause of homelessness in our community and its obvious ethos to meet this problem in such a professional and caring way.

OP: *What is your background, and how do you believe this serves you on the board?*

JD: I retired from the Victoria Police Department after 34 years in 2013, and it was clear throughout my career that homelessness dramatically impacts the quality of life for many people in our community. I made

good strides in my policing career on some of the problems and wanted to keep contributing solutions after I retired.

OP: *If someone was interested in joining the board, what would your best advice be?*

JD: My advice is that you will have a wonderful opportunity to work with people who care deeply about the marginalized and the downtrodden, and who try to make a difference. It is a chance to apply your professional skills and personal acumen to solving homelessness.

OP: *What is your vision for the future of Our Place?*

JD: My vision is one where we continue to grow both in terms of capacity and in the number of services we can provide. For example, educational and skill set enhancements, to my mind, are pathways out of homelessness. Increasing our advocacy for issues of social justice is also a role I see the board taking on more stridently.

OP: *What is one thing you would like our supporters to know about Our Place?*

JD: Our Place is not just a shelter and meal services. It's a place where hope takes the form of real life results. It is a dynamic high functioning organization with very competent professional staff succeeding in a mission to help desperate people and make this community a better place.



Things We Need

- BOTTLED WATER**
- SUN SCREEN**
- LIP BALM**
- FLIP-FLOPS**
- SOCKS & UNDERWEAR**
- FIRST-AID PACKS**
- TENTS & TARPS**
- TOILETRIES**
- BLANKETS**
- DRY GOODS**
- FRUITS & VEGETABLES**
- MEN'S CLOTHING**

SUMMER IS 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.



< **DENTAL HYGIENE:** Dental Hygiene students from Camosun College regularly squeeze into the handicap shower stall in our hygiene area on Wednesday mornings to provide free oral health care for the Our Place family. It's difficult to tell because of the masks, but the student hygienists shown here are flashing huge smiles as they work.

Creative Ways to Give



FOODBANK FILL-UP FOR PETS: The first official food drive for our pet foodbank was a tremendous success thanks to organizer Natalie Fairbrother, middle, and Kai Yates, right, of Sooke Animal Food and Rescue Society. Thanks also goes to those who supported this event, including every person who dropped off what they could, CBC Radio, CFax1070, 107.3 Kool FM, Your Pet Pals, Relish Cafe, and the SAFRS' volunteers who helped bag up the food.

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 300 family members. Our talented kitchen staff prepares a cooked breakfast. A small fee covers the cost of the food, and we encourage a cash donation on top. Lunches, dinners and summer barbecues can also be sponsored.



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

Hope Fund created

Thanks to generous seed capital from the **United Church Victoria Presbytery's Provision Fund**, we now have the **Hope Fund** — a pool of money that can provide hope for Our Place family members during a critical moment in their lives. If a family member cannot pay for such things as new identification or needs proper work boots for a last-minute job opportunity, they can access the Hope Fund and ensure they do not miss out on important and life-changing opportunities. The Hope Fund has no administrative costs, so every dollar donated to the fund goes directly to the most vulnerable citizens in our community. If you wish to donate to the Hope Fund, please contact Peter at 250-388-7112, ext. 258.

Our Place Special Events

National Aboriginal Day

Friday, June 20, 2014

National Aboriginal Day celebrations

Family Baseball Games

July/August

Join us for barbeque & baseball at Beacon Hill Park. Tentative dates are: July 4 & 25; Aug. 8 & 22 (weather permitting). Check our website for updates.

Our Place Pride

Sunday, July 6, 2014

Walk with us in the Victoria Pride Parade to celebrate Hope & Belonging

Splish Splash Charity Carwash

Saturday, Sept. 7, 2014

9:00am to 2:00pm

Support Our Place and have your car washed by a local celebrity

Coming Soon — a brand new website

Working with a local supporter, Our Place is almost ready to launch a brand new website that will make it easier to find the stories, services, and volunteer opportunities that matter most to you. You can find it at the same address: **ourplacesociety.com** Look for it to launch this summer.

Special Thanks

To Derek Ford for donating his time and skill to capture wonderful photography.


Hope and Belonging

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