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Executive Director's Message

by Don Evans

Isn't it wonderful to start a new year feeling a strong sense of hope and accomplishment? With the momentum of all that happened in 2012, that is exactly how our staff feels this January: encouraged by every goal we've met and excited to build a stronger community of hope and belonging in Greater Victoria's downtown core this coming year.

Our Christmas dinner was a perfect way to end the year. As I looked around the room on December 20th, I saw a strong glimpse of joy, hope, and anticipation spread among every one of our volunteers and family members – even to “the least of these.” It is in these moments that I feel we are all in this together, every single one of us playing our own part to reach our *ultimate* goal: to provide a sense of hope and belonging to all who need it.

Emotions like the one I had at Christmas are important. They do not deny the hardships faced by those who are experiencing poverty. They do not ignore the barriers in many of our family members' lives. But they are moments when hope puts sorrow on hold, when solidarity triumphs over socioeconomic divide, and when a sense of community pierces hardship. These are moments when we start to understand why we do the work we do.

I want to thank you for helping us make this Christmas possible. Our many volunteers and donors provided a season of hope for those who needed it most. But there is more to be thankful for than just December: I am thankful to everyone who in 2012 helped us to get where we are today, at the start of 2013.

We are thrilled that in December we were able to start opening on weekends for lunch, providing critical nourishment and support to those in need. This is a crucial step toward reaching our goal of expanded hours– one day providing full-time support every day of the week . We know that we couldn't have done it without you, without your partnership and without your support. I am truly grateful.

Our goals of expansion seem even more crucial at the peak of Victoria's cold, harsh weather. We might not have three feet of snow like some cities in Canada, but the damp, cold weather can be bone-chilling, and even deadly. This is the kind of cold that sticks with you. That's why resources like our showers, blankets, and hot meals are so important. They offer relief, hope and security during inclement weather. They are glimpses of hospitality. We are grateful to be able to provide warmth at the coldest time of the year.

Once again, we couldn't do it without you. Thank you.

Warm Regards,

Don Evans
Executive Director

“ It is in these moments that I feel we are all in this together, every single one of us playing our own part to reach our ultimate goal: to provide a sense of hope and belonging to all who need it.”



Christmas at Our Place:

Your Help Makes a Difference.

Christmas is about having a place that knows, loves, and values you – it's about having a place called home. For many of our family members, Our Place Society is that place. And thanks to you, many hearts were filled with a sense of hope and belonging this Christmas.

Because you provided nourishing food, warm winter clothes and compassion, we were able to spread holiday cheer to everyone who needed extra support this season. With the help of volunteers, staff and donors like you, we served almost 1000 delicious meals of stuffing, vegetables, mashed potatoes and *homemade* pies. (You can watch the video at ourplacesociety.com!) With the help of local churches, schools, government offices and community groups, we also distributed over 900 Angel gifts of warm clothing and other cherished items. Then, on December 25th we opened our doors with home-baked goods, gifts, music and fellowship; over 350 of Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens celebrated Christmas Day in a warm, safe and inviting atmosphere.

"I give to Our Place because I think of all the people who go hungry, day in and day out, and hope that one day this will change." – Margaret

It Takes a Whole Community to Make the Holidays Come True:

Thank you.

Our Place was a place of hope and celebration this Christmas and it was all because of you, our wider community. We would like to extend a special thanks to everyone who helped our family members, staff, and volunteers celebrate. The holidays wouldn't have been the same for our family without people like Lynn and Jolie who organized a fantastic Christmas party at First Metropolitan United Church: *Thank you*. It also wouldn't have been the same without the CBC's annual Dickens event. This was an incredible performance thanks to CBC's talented personalities, Louise Rose and the four community choirs. Finally, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Lynda Ryder, who organized the Angel Gifts program. Your efforts made a significant difference for our family.

"I give because I'm grateful for all that I've been blessed with and want to share with those who don't have as much." – Michelle



Family Focus:

Gordon

by Blythe Hutchcroft

If you walk into Our Place on a Wednesday afternoon, you'll find a line of people waiting for Gordon. Every week this gentle man extends care and compassion to a host of people who sleep outside or on hard mats – people whose shoulders ache, whose spines are stiff, and whose backs are in dire need of some acupressure. Having just graduated, he is now licensed to practice acupressure on a regular basis. Gordon is soft-spoken, thoughtful, and articulate. Though an integral part of our volunteer team, Gordon's life wasn't always so gratifying.

"I spent about a year and a half sleeping outside," he tells me. "I was between Vancouver and Victoria when I started gravitating towards the street."

Gordon grew up in a family of 9 in Calgary, but had roots on Salt Spring Island, where his grandparents lived. He held various jobs: he worked up North, he ran his own business, and

he apprenticed as a jeweler, among other things. "I go home for Christmas every year now," he tells me. He aptly likens his relationship with his Albertan family to his relationship with the ocean. "I don't see the ocean every day, but I know it's always there – and nothing will ever change that."

"My dad died when I was 21," he tells me. Gordon's father was only 56; his youngest sibling was 16 at the time. Remembering his west-coast roots, Gordon eventually migrated west. "My brother was living here and my grandmother too," he says. "My brother and I lived on a boat for a couple years together."

"Shortly after that is when I sort of lost it," he shares. "I didn't see a decline in my mental health, but things were certainly getting weird." Gordon was living on the street in Vancouver when one day, some people walking by found him passed out in a park.

“I came to and they had phoned the ambulance,” he recalls. This happened two more times before everyone started getting suspicious that something more complicated was taking place. “The third time they found me, they committed me to St Paul’s hospital,” he recalls. “I later learned that all this was happening because of my schizophrenia. I was just in overload.”

Though he spent 6 weeks in hospital, Gordon wasn’t officially diagnosed with schizophrenia until the early 90’s, when he moved to Victoria and got connected with health support services. “Some people get freaked out when they get diagnosed,” he explains. “But for me, it was just like a light came on.” Gordon thoughtfully shares his knowledge with me, explaining that about one third of people with schizophrenia make a full recovery, one third learn to cope, and one third never get past the psychosis. He recalls how his own doctor explained this very thing to him, providing Gordon with clarity and hope.

“At the time, I couldn’t even really boil water,” he remembers. That’s when Gordon started coming to Our Place (which was then called the Upper Room) for meals. “I started coming here for dinner, because the biggest task I could focus on for the week was something as simple as having a bath.” Our Place became somewhere to drink coffee on a Tuesday afternoon, somewhere to hang out and smoke: a place to think. “This was a place that I could drift if I needed to drift,” he says.

Gordon was hospitalized for the second time almost ten years later. This time, he was there for almost 6 months. The doctors worked further with his medication until Gordon left the hospital, finally feeling like he was on solid ground.

Gordon has progressed beyond what anyone could have imagined since then. Our Director of Operations, Gail, remembers the first time he wandered into the Drop-In centre. “Gordon is an example of our mission at work,” she reflects. “His progress has been remarkable. He supports other family members now, helping them find their own sense of hope and belonging, all while fulfilling his own goals in an unassuming and positive way,” she beams. “It’s just incredible.”



Gordon credits his doctors and family support as the two main things that helped him recover. “My family did their best to find what this illness is about,” he tells me. “I really don’t think of the illness anymore –” he says. “It is such a small part of my life now.”

There is a certain confidence we acquire from knowing we have a community that loves and supports us somewhere. Gordon links his family’s love and support – an integral key to success that many Our Place family members don’t have – to never losing hope and confidence in himself. “I know I won’t ever have to sleep outside again,” he tells me. “Because I know where the supports are now and I would recognize my psychosis coming on, I think.”

Today, Gordon offers weekly compassion and practical care to a variety of people at Our Place – many of whom are in similar places as he once was. “I suppose what I’m trying to do is formalize the kind of help I’ve had from others along the way,” he says thoughtfully. “It’s a way to engage. And I do enjoy the response that my acupressure gets,” he says smiling with the confidence of someone who knows he’s making a real difference.



VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

Our Place volunteers keep the wheels of hope and belonging turning. The commitment is minimal and the rewards are immeasurable. If you would like to commit to a weekly shift, email: volunteer@ourplacesociety.com to register for one of the following orientation dates:

Jan 10, Jan 24, Feb 7, Feb 21, March 7, March 21, April 4, April 18.



Program Focus:

Transitional Housing

by Blythe Hutchcroft

“Our Place picked me up from hopelessness, from not knowing where I was going. They housed me and got me into treatment. They started the ball rolling. I was just a shell of a human and they got me back into recovery, heading in the right direction again.” - DOMINIC , FAMILY MEMBER

Imagine sleeping outside: roaming from shelter to shelter in hopes of finding a mat in a crowded room, spending night after night on cold, damp cement, and waking up to find your small host of possessions – the fewer, the more valuable – have gone missing in the night while you struggled to sleep. For many of us this sounds chaotic, even unbearable. No one chooses this cyclical existence. The sad reality, however, is that tangible barriers – whether poverty, mental illness, trauma, or addiction – make it nearly impossible to find a place that will accept you as a tenant. Due to these barriers, many of our family members can’t find a safe place to call home. With the lack of stable, affordable housing, most people can’t overcome these obstacles. The cycle of homelessness continues: barriers harden, doors close, the nights get colder, and life is reduced to survival at best.

That’s where our transitional housing program comes in. Upstairs from our buzzing Drop-In Centre, Our Place has three floors of individual living units that provide a sense of home and belonging for 45 of Greater Victoria’s “hardest to house.” These units house people coming off the street, people waiting for

detox services or rehabilitation programs, and people committed to more stable, independent living. Our program is designed to help folks overcome the perpetual barriers they faced on the street. So much more than just a shelter, this vital program focuses on client-centered renewal, rehabilitation, and recovery.

It starts small. If you’ve been living without a space to call your own, basic skills like doing laundry and keeping your place clean and tidy can seem overwhelming at first. After tackling these small but empowering life skills, our residents collaborate with staff to explore issues of anger management, relationships, personal hygiene, health and fitness, and other life skills. Residents, like Peter, who recently transitioned out of housing, collaborate with housing support staff and a mental health and addictions clinician to develop and reach healthy goals.

We welcomed Peter over a year ago when an Outreach Worker secured a temporary room for him here. “She saved me,” he says. “If she hadn’t, I’d be dead.” Today, Peter is one of the twenty-two residents who transitioned to more stable, independent living in 2012. “I was only supposed to be in Our Place housing for 3 weeks,” Peter reflects, “But, my Mental Health worker saw something in me. He thought there was hope for me – and he didn’t give up.” For many of our family members, support and stability are key ingredients to overcoming any barrier. “I have hope that I never knew before,” says Peter “And it really is all because of Our Place.”

It takes a whole community to provide a sense of hope and belonging

Sponsor-a-breakfast today

At the end of the month, *every penny counts*. That's why *League Investment's* regular sponsored breakfast, which takes place on the last Wednesday of every month, counts for *everything*.

The last Wednesday of every month: while this date might not mean much to most of us, it means everything to many of our family members – because it's payday. Two hours before folks can line up for their monthly social assistance cheque, we open our doors at 7am so *League Investment* can serve their monthly breakfast – which is all the more appreciated at the end of a long, expensive month. League employees pick one of three menu options, fund the meal, and serve it to our grateful guests.

“Sponsoring a breakfast is such a simple, easy thing to do – but it's truly meaningful and appreciated by all. It gives our staff perspective,” says one *League Investment* employee. “The commitment is negligible compared to the benefit received.”

Anyone can have a significant effect on our community by participating in our Sponsor-a-Breakfast program. Visit ourplacesociety.com/sponsor-a-breakfast to join with the churches, community groups, and businesses, like *League*, who are making a difference throughout the year.



Our Place Remembers: John Ronald (1926 – 2012)

Lillian Ronald folds her husband's wooly socks and places them in bags by the door. “They're perfect for the family members,” she says. She is getting ready to deliver yet another load of John's socks, pants, and coats to Our Place's clothing room. Because of Lillian, many of our family members will always carry with them – whether they know it or not – a memento of a man who cared deeply for them. “I know he is smiling down as I share his things,” she says.

Our Place lost a valuable member of our community last August. Committed to caring for Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens, John Ronald was part of a team of people who dreamt of Our Place before the building even had blueprints. “He was absolutely thrilled to be a part of what happened,” Lillian says. “We both were.”

John and Lillian weren't distant supporters. You would often find them mingling with our family members at open houses or dancing at Our Place parties. “We always said to each other: *let's live each day to the fullest*,” Lillian remembers. “He gave his all to Our Place because he wanted to see something evolve,” she continues. “To make it a place for those without shelter to come and find care and love.”

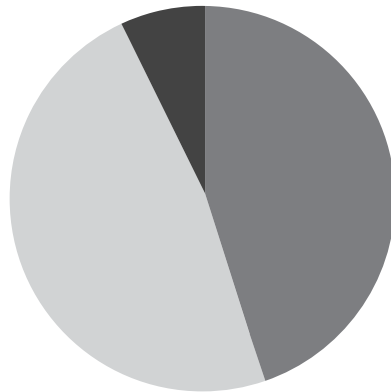
More than just socks for the winter, John left a strong legacy in these walls. His selfless philosophy and generous spirit made a real impact on this organization. “I think that he felt that his life was so very lucky and he felt that he was able to do the things that he wanted to do,” says Lillian. “Not unlike many of the volunteers here, John wanted to give back what he received.”

John Ronald served on our Board from 2003 -2008. He will be missed by all of us at Our Place.

Our Year in Review

Total Support

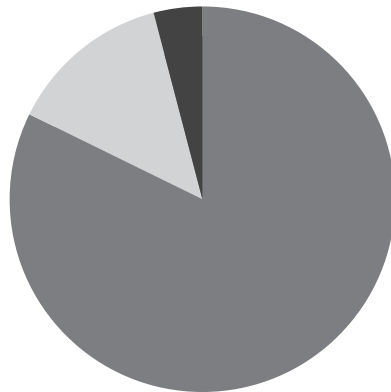
Thousands joined us in helping Greater Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. The following chart illustrates the source of our funding support:



- 45% Donations
- 48% Grants
- 7% Housing & other income

Contributions in Action

We have worked diligently to be efficient. The following chart illustrates how funds have been utilized:



- 84% Programs
- 12% Management & Admin
- 4% Development

The above financial information is based on audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2012.



Thank you to all who made Duke Ellington possible.

The Sacred Music of Duke Ellington mesmerized over 600 attendees at a fundraiser event in November. Dee Daniels, Marcus Mosley, Fred Stride Orchestra, Sacred Gospel Choir and Tap Dancer Alex Dugdale delivered a spectacular performance. We are grateful to our many sponsors including our Platinum Sponsor, Ralmax Group of Companies, for helping make this event happen.