

# Our Stories

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2019

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Hope and Belonging

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

# Executive Director's Message

**With the holiday season behind us and a brand new year ahead, it's a good time to reflect on our achievements and offer heartfelt gratitude for the generous support Our Place has received over the past 12 months.**

But while we are thankful for how far we have come, we are also reminded of how far we have to go.

When winter arrives and family members need a hot meal, shelter and warm clothing we get a clearer picture of what's really happening.

The truth is, there are still several hundred people in Victoria who live year-round without a roof over their head, and without proper shelter it's nearly impossible for them to turn their lives around. This year we've seen the number of people with more significant mental health issues grow.

When people are living on the street, they can't adhere to their medication routines or adequately address substance abuse or mental health issues. Instead of self-improvement, they're worried about coping with daily survival – finding a place to sleep and trying to avoid getting assaulted or robbed.

Mental health and overall well-being decline rapidly when people are living on the street.

The solution is to get them inside. Once their living situation is stabilized, we can offer mental health and substance abuse supports, life skills training and employment programs.

Programs like Choices and My Place, which we opened in response to the tent city on



the court house lawn, have helped hundreds of former people experiencing homelessness transition into permanent housing. We've been taking this approach for three years and it continues to yield positive results.

While government has set aside \$90 million for permanent housing in Victoria, it will be several years before those units are built.

In the meantime, Our Place Society is collaborating with Leadership Victoria to find suitable locations for temporary modular housing. If we can find a way to open six projects that could each house up to 50 people on a temporary basis, it will go a long way to eliminating street homelessness in Victoria.

On behalf of everyone at Our Place, thank you for your continued support

With heartfelt gratitude,



## THANK 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!



## Our Recent Events

### 1 TRC Grand Opening

Our Place achieved a major milestone in October with the opening of the Therapeutic Recovery Community in View Royal, a peer-supported facility for men who have struggled with homelessness, addiction and incarceration. The B.C. Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions provided \$4.7 million over seven years, while Island Health is contributing \$300,000 yearly.

### 2 Christmas dinner

Local politicians, police, community leaders and volunteers helped serve close to 800 Christmas meals to Victoria's most vulnerable citizens at the annual Our Place holiday meal on December 18. For many of the people who frequent Our Place, the Christmas turkey feast is the closest they come

to having the kind of Christmas dinner most of us take for granted.

### 3 Angels among us

For Our Place family members who don't have a nice warm home and a tree surrounded by presents during the holidays, Angel Gifts is there to fill the gap. Angel Gifts is made possible through the generosity of volunteers, local businesses, churches, schools, community groups and government offices. Donors receive information about the person they are buying for to help match the gifts with the recipient's Christmas wishes. Each of the nearly 700 gifts has a value of \$40, and "angels" are encouraged to add a personal message to the recipient. The program has been in existence for 15 years.

### A Christmas Carol

The annual Our Place / CBC reading of Charles Dickens' timeless classic had a fresh look this year with a new lineup of well-known broadcasters and music provided

for the first time by the outREACH Choir. CBC personalities were on hand to read their interpretations of A Christmas Carol. Perennial favourites Gregor Craigie and Bob MacDonald were joined by Khalil Akhtar, Robyn Burns, Megan Thomas, Sheryl MacKay and Shelagh Rogers. The outREACH choir, a recently formed, all-inclusive group featuring Our Place family members, people with physical and mental challenges and mentors from the



wider community, performed an array of well-known holiday songs to a crowd of more than 300 people. The 2018 edition of A Christmas Carol was dedicated to CBC legend Arthur Black, a veteran of many Dickens readings who died last February.



**LATKE LUNCH A LABOUR OF LOVE:** For the sixth straight year, members of Congregation Emanu-El hosted the annual Big Latke Lunch in the upstairs dining hall. With gypsy jazz-influenced Klezmer music supplied by the fabulous Klezbians and a little dreidel spinning on the side, the Big Latke lunch was once again one of the most popular events of the season.

## Our Family

### Marlon's Story

**F**or most of his 57 years, Marlon Bowe's life was defined by a cycle of addiction, poverty, violence and prison sentences. He's cheated death more than once and has the scars to prove it.

"I've been stabbed about seven times and shot twice," he says. "I shouldn't even be alive but here I am, still hanging in there."

Born on the Alkali Lake Indian Reserve, Marlon and his 11 brothers and sisters were raised mostly by their mother. His father, a hard-drinking pro rodeo rider, spent most of his time on the road. When he did come home, the alcohol and violence that came with him made life miserable.

"He'd beat up my mom. Sometimes I tried to stand in the way and I got beat up too," he recalls. "He'd bring his friends home to party and they abused some of my brothers and sisters. We told him but he didn't believe it."

When he was just seven years old, Marlon and a 14-year-old friend from the reserve ran away to Edmonton, where he lived for two years, stealing watches and wallets to survive and sleeping in churches and laundromats.

"I'd sleep behind the dryers because it was always warm there. In the morning I'd sneak into where the vending machines were and steal a pop and some chocolate bars and that's how my day would begin," he says. "I got caught a few times. They'd put me on a bus but I'd just jump off at the next stop and go back to Edmonton."

Ever since then, he's lived the life of a transient, stopping at home once in a while and staying

with either his mother or his grandmother before hitting the road again. He's lived in, and been arrested in, towns all across Canada.

"I was always going away because it was the only way I felt free," he says.

Marlon was just eight years old the first time he tried heroin, which was given to him by a cousin who was addicted to drugs.

"I didn't fix (the heroin), but I ate some and I remember laying there looking up at the sky feeling like everything was all right," he says.

During his teenage years, Marlon started injecting heroin, kick-starting a chronic addiction that has had a hold on him ever since.

Four decades later, with the help of family and staff at Our Place, Marlon is working hard to turn his life around. He's stopped using heroin, managed to secure temporary housing and works part time power-washing the sidewalks outside Our Place at 919 Pandora.

On the left side of his torso, the scar from a bullet wound serves as a constant reminder of his closest brush with death.

About 20 years ago when he was living in Vancouver, Marlon heard that his aunt had been beaten up and robbed in her home by a guy named Jimmy and his brothers, who were well-known criminals in the community.

## LEGACY OF LOVE

A PLANNED GIFT  
CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

JOIN THE OVER 200 SUPPORTERS of Our Place who have become part of our Legacy of Love program and confirmed or are in the process of including Our Place in their estate planning. Leaving a gift in your will for Our Place will ensure that those experiencing poverty will always have a welcoming and supportive environment with vital services and programs at our downtown location. You are truly helping to transform lives. If you are interested in learning more about leaving a Legacy of Love with Our Place, please call Marg at 250-940-5067 or email [legacy@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:legacy@ourplacesociety.com)



Marlon and a friend drove back to Williams Lake to confront the culprits and were met at the door by Jimmy, brandishing a fully-loaded .308 rifle. Jimmy shot Marlon's friend in the leg and as the two tried to flee, Marlon took a bullet just below his rib-cage.

When he got out of hospital a couple of months later, Marlon went back to the only life he'd known – stealing and dealing drugs to support his habit.

Over the years he's worked as rodeo rider, a musician, pipe-fitter, mill worker, carpenter and miner. He never spent much time in school, but worked on his reading and writing skills whenever he went to jail, which was often.

"In a weird way jail was good for me. Whenever they offered me courses I'd take them," he says. "Every opportunity to learn I've taken it."

He's had two serious relationships in his life – the first with the mother of his four children (three boys and a girl) and the second with his current partner.

Five years ago, Marlon's ability to survive suffered a serious blow when he had a stroke that left him barely able to speak, walk or play guitar, a hobby he remains passionate about.

**It took him two years to regain his speech and although he has a noticeable limp, he can walk and ride a bicycle again.**

But the stroke severely limited his ability to work and, three years ago, he ended up living on the streets of Victoria. Over time, he became a regular visitor to Our Place, where the support of friends, staff and family eventually led him to sobriety.

"I still need the methadone to keep me from doing heroin, but at least this way

I don't have to be drug sick in jail or do crimes to support my habit," he says.

After starting out as a volunteer with the Our Place facilities department, Marlon moved on to the Hand Up program, which offers 12 hours a week of paid work but also requires commitment to change and increased responsibility.

His consistent efforts earned him a small suite at Our Place and he no longer has to worry about having a place to sleep.

Now that he's reached a place that offers continued hope and growth, Marlon has become a role model to other people that Our Place serves and plans to participate in more employment programs to further enhance his work skills.

"It's kind of cool working at Our Place because I'm around all the people I know."

**THERE ARE GREAT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES** in our administration office, kitchen, hygiene area, and much more. Become part of a dynamic team of compassionate people assisting Victoria's most vulnerable citizens. To find out when the next volunteer orientation session is being held, call Dawn, our **Manager of Volunteers**, at 250-388-7112 Ext. 258 or email [volunteermgr@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:volunteermgr@ourplacesociety.com)

## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

OUR PLACE VOLUNTEERS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF WHAT WE DO

# Our Volunteers

outREACH Choir  
and the  
power of song



**As a lifelong voice coach, choir director and mother of a special needs child, Anne-Marie Brimacombe learned all about the therapeutic potential of music a long time ago.**

These days she's using that knowledge to help Our Place family members discover the healing power of song.

Two years ago, Anne-Marie and her husband Peter launched the West Coast REACH Association to give people with special needs an opportunity to sing in an integrated setting alongside members of the city's wider choral community.

"In Victoria there are many music programs for persons with special needs but as far as we know there's no integrated programs," says Anne-Marie.

Earlier this year, a member of the West Coast Reach choir who is also a member of the Our Place family, suggested starting a second program to offer the same opportunity to members of Victoria's street community.

Called the OutREACH Choir, the group meets in the Our Place chapel every Wednesday and has about two dozen regular attendees, about half of whom also sing with West Coast REACH.

The OutREACH choir's first public performance took place Dec. 13 at the annual reading of A Christmas Carol, an Our Place fundraiser sponsored by CBC Radio Victoria.



**The seeds of West Coast REACH were planted in 2010 when Anne-Marie and Peter relocated to Trinidad and Tobago, where she was born.**

While working to start choir programs at local schools, she discovered that special needs children went to separate schools and had no access to music programs. "I just thought these children really deserve it, so I started volunteering in those two schools," she says.

After six years in Tobago, Anne-Marie and Peter decided to move back to Victoria and develop music programs for people with disabilities.

"The members tell us it's the highlight of their week. We see them come alive and we see the amazing impact on everyone else who sees them."

## PROGRAMS

### COMPUTER BASICS

**COMPUTER BASICS:** Camosun College continues its very popular Computer Basics class at Our Place this year. Computer skills are introduced at the fundamental level to help students gain the knowledge and confidence to perform basic computer operations and essential computer literacy skills such as basic keyboarding, word processing and electronic communication. The instructors can accommodate all levels of student experience.

# Our Partners

From the time they started their first pharmacy in the West Shore in 1978, Naz and Yasmine Rayani made a point of giving back to the community.

Now their son Rasool is following in his parents footsteps and teaching his children to carry on the family's legacy of community service.

"My wife and I have young children, as does my sister (Zahra)," Rasool says.

**"We want to inspire them to follow the example set by their grandparents of engagement and volunteerism."**

Naz has long been recognized for his work in the Victoria community. In 2006, he was appointed to the Order of Canada and in 2012, he received the Lifetime Leadership Award from Leadership Victoria for his commitment to charitable causes and leadership in philanthropy.

What started with the first pharmacy in 1978 has led to Heart Pharmacy now with four locations on the Island and a motto of "dispensing loving care for over 30 years".

Now company president, Rasool, along with Zahra and her husband, is continuing Naz's commitment to giving back.

Rasool became familiar with Our Place as a board member with the Victoria Foundation back in 2012.

Since then, he's become a strong



supporter, donating time, money and resources. His latest project is providing pharmacy services to the newly launched Therapeutic Recovery Community in View Royal, an innovative treatment program for men who have repeat experiences with incarceration, homelessness and addiction.

Focusing on physical and mental well-being, the centre's holistic approach includes working with nurses, psychologists, counsellors and First Nations groups.

**"We believe the success of this program will have a ripple effect on healing our community as we fight the scary and devastating effects of the opioid crisis," he says.**

The Rayani family is also focused on solutions for seniors such as home-based care for the elderly.

"There is so much more that we want to collaborate with as it relates to the health of our region and we know we're doing it right because we are still growing."

**SENIOR CITIZEN SERVICES:** To better serve the growing number of seniors who rely on the services provided by Our Place, the organization recently hired Katelyn Collins (right), as part-time seniors programming co-ordinator. A native of St. John's, Newfoundland, Katelyn studied recreation at Memorial University before moving west to Victoria last summer. Programs will include seniors lunches every Monday and outings in partnership with other seniors centres. "There's a need for specific programming for that demographic," Katelyn says.



## Things We Need

**UNDERWEAR  
SOCKS  
WARM JACKETS  
BLANKETS  
SLEEPING BAGS  
DRY GOODS  
GLOVES  
TOILETRIES**

WINTER IS HERE! Our fellow citizens in need will feel the cold and damp on the streets of Greater Victoria. Empty your closets and bring your warm coats and jackets, blankets and sleeping bags to Our Place. Donations of new underwear and socks are also greatly appreciated.

**Contact Tracy at  
250-388-7112 ext. 259.**

# Season of Giving



**STICKING TO THEIR KNITTING** – Alice, Diane, Barbara and Cecile from Carleton House retirement residence stop by every Christmas with a supply of hand-knitted blankets, toques, gloves and scarves to help keep our family members warm during the cold winter months.

## 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 350 Our Place family members.

Our talented kitchen staff prepares a cooked breakfast.

A small fee of \$500 covers the cost of the food, and as always we welcome additional donations on top of the food costs. Lunches, dinners and summer barbecues can also be sponsored. For more information, visit our website or contact Tracy Campbell at 250-388-7112 ext. 259 or [TracyC@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:TracyC@ourplacesociety.com)



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## Hungry Hearts

A high-profile event that raised \$148,000 last year, Hungry Hearts is a sell-out event that features some of the best food the region has to offer. More than 225 guests will enjoy an evening of exquisite small bites from six of Victoria's top chefs. Guests will also enjoy live music, silent and live auctions, and will get to vote on their favourite culinary creation.

Last year's winner, Chef Boateng, will be returning in April 2019 to defend his title as Hungry Hearts champion.

The tremendous support for this event from our sponsors, donors and guests make it possible for Our Place to continue serving over 1,200 meals a day and provide compassionate care and services to those in need. For info e-mail [stevens@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:stevens@ourplacesociety.com)



# Coldest Night of the Year

Whether you're looking to put together your own team, join someone else's team or just sponsor a walker, don't worry there's still plenty of time to sign up for Our Place's Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser walk.

Staff, family members, friends and supporters will be gathering together Saturday, Feb. 23, 2019, for the second annual community walk to raise awareness about homelessness. Participants have a choice of walking two, five or 10 kilometres.

The five-kilometre walk was the most popular last year, but all three routes are available this year. The goal for this year's walk is to raise over \$60,000 for programs and services at Our Place.

Part of Canada's National Walk for Homelessness, Coldest Night of the Year offers members of the broader community an opportunity to make a human connection with some of the people that their donations support.

The walk also highlights the need for more shelter to keep those less fortunate out of the cold during the winter months, when living on the street takes the greatest physical and emotional toll on people.

To get involved contact Steven at [stevens@ourplacesociety.com](mailto:stevens@ourplacesociety.com) or 250-940-5064.



**coldest\*night**  
OF THE YEAR 

  
**Hope and Belonging**

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