



PEOPLE OF

CoolAid

SPRING 2024

Recovering and putting down roots with your help

You can hear the hard-won confidence in Jody's voice.

She's talking about the first time she stepped inside her new home at 210 Gorge Road, a Cool Aid building with both supportive and affordable apartments.

"I felt super-excited to be in a clean, shiny home in such a beautiful neighbourhood. My self-worth was back and I was thrilled to see a full kitchen where I could cook. Most importantly, I knew I'd be able to continue my recovery in a safe place," she says.

A few years ago, Jody was a university student, living in her own apartment. "Then, I met a boy and we got into addictions," she remembers. "I got evicted and ended up on the streets for three years. I suffered from psychosis caused by the drugs and was admitted to the hospital under the Mental Health Act."

After the hospital, Jody entered a drug rehabilitation program. Once stabilized, she moved into an apartment, but the building was soon put up for sale.

"I was being supported by a crisis management team and they helped me apply to live at Gorge Road. It's been absolutely life-changing."



Jody credits her progress to the environment of the building and its staff. In the quiet building, she has "lots of good periods of sleep" and doesn't worry about anyone stealing her belongings. "I lost everything when I was evicted and then homeless," she says.

The staff at Gorge Road add to Jody's sense of security. "There's always someone at the front desk to say 'good morning.' And if I'm struggling through

a bad day, I can have a safe solution-based conversation with an outreach worker. There's also donated food, household items, and clothing if I need them.

Dustin Leavitt, Manager at 210 Gorge Road, points out that community support is key to helping residents get their lives back on track. **"Donations help provide everything from teaching household skills to ensuring one-to-one support and keeping the building safe."** ▶

Looking back with gratitude, looking forward with hope

I'd like to tell you about Dan, who asked for Tylenol from our mobile health clinic team. *That simple request turned his life around.* Our doctor discovered a tooth infection, prescribed antibiotics, and referred Dan to the Cool Aid Dental Clinic where he was treated. Then, our staff helped him apply for a disability pension and find stable housing.

This is the profound difference you make by supporting Cool Aid. Please accept my heartfelt thanks for everything you make possible, including the following...

In December, more than 350 residents from Cool Aid housing sat down to a Christmas dinner sponsored and served by Belmont Property staff at the Downtown Community Centre. It was a celebration that brought our neighbours together and gave so much joy.

Also, supporters like you



provided grocery gift cards and gently used winter coats to those who needed them most.

In February, the *Everyone Deserves to Smile* dental clinic campaign raised over \$75,000 and thanks to you, low-income patients will receive treatments ranging from hygiene to root canals and dentures.

With summer on the way, there's more good news to share. In a few months, 56 new units of supportive housing

will open on Balmoral Road. And, later this year, tenants will move into the Crosstown development, which will offer supportive and affordable housing, plus a community health centre, daycare, kitchen, and cafe.

As we continue to serve our community, the cost of living and food insecurity are big issues and there is always a need for donations toward grocery gift cards. We're also looking for volunteers to share their time and unique talents. For more information on all of these opportunities, please visit coolaid.org.

With my deepest thanks,

Elin Bjarnason
Chief Executive Officer

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Mixed housing, with both supportive and affordable units, is a very successful model that will be expanded at the new Crosstown development opening later this year. "We're delighted to be creating real homes in flourishing communities," Dustin adds.

With the support she's received, Jody is flourishing too. She says "I'm putting down roots and nesting." She's applying for jobs and plans to take a course in addiction and mental health counselling.

"I feel really empowered. Cool Aid met me where I was and I've come a long way.

"We're delighted to be creating real homes in flourishing communities..."

I'd like to say thank you to everyone who supports them", Jody says with a big smile.

Thank you for providing new homes and new-found hope. Together, we're changing lives.

How you provide compassion, one meal at a time

“For people struggling with complex mental health and substance use issues, food is more than nutrition,” Paul Stewart says. “Food gives comfort and a sense of belonging. Enjoying a meal and chatting with our cooks may be the only human interaction someone has that day.”

Paul is our Food Service Manager at Cool Aid. He supervises food preparation at two commercial kitchens: Rock Bay Landing, our main shelter, and Mount Edwards Court, a supportive and affordable housing site. From these two locations, food is delivered and served to our tenants across the city.

“We don’t run soup kitchens,” Paul says. “Our cooks really care. They make quality meals and they’re committed to welcoming and building rapport with everyone who comes through

the door.”

“Donations are crucial to what we do,” Paul says. “There is no such thing as a small donation. Every dollar counts now, especially for folks on fixed incomes. And people are truly grateful. They leave messages on my phone, saying *‘Thank you. I was struggling and the food helped me move onto a better stage in my life.’*”

Paul and his team also prepare holiday meals for celebrations at the Downtown Community Centre. And to cut down on the amount of food going into landfill, they work with other organizations, like the Mustard Seed Food Bank, to use rescued food whenever possible.

Food Services is expanding to meet the growing need for food security. Thanks to donors just like you, the Crosstown housing development set to open later this year will include



a new kitchen and cafe. Once they’re up and running, we’ll offer onsite culinary and life skills training programs that will help participants enter or return to the workforce.

Thank you for supporting dignified access to healthy food—and so much more—through our Food Service. ■

Your **Impact**

Here’s the incredible difference you made last year



7,710

AFFORDABLE DENTAL TREATMENTS GIVEN TO PATIENTS IN NEED



300,000

NUTRITIOUS MEALS SERVED



125

SHELTER BEDS PROVIDED

YOU Inspire Us

Affordable care and a reason to smile—thanks to you

Supporters just like you made this year's Everyone Deserves to Smile campaign a huge success. More than \$75,000 was raised in February to provide urgently-needed dental care to low-income adults like Paul's mom, Telma.



Paul and his family moved from Peru to Victoria in 2022. A month after their arrival, Telma fell and fractured vertebrae in her spine. Then, less than a year later, his wife was

diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. Both emergencies drained the family's savings. Telma had always taken care of her teeth, but was having problems due to age and procedures she'd had done in Peru. Paul says, "She wasn't eating and was losing weight. We were told that the best option was to extract her teeth and get dentures, but we couldn't afford it."

Paul heard about the Cool Aid Dental Clinic from a friend. A donor-funded dental bursary covered the cost of his mother's dental work. "We were going through such a hard time and this kind of help was so unexpected," he says. Telma is eating better and gaining weight. The family plans to give back to the dental clinic when their lives settle down.

Thank you for providing dental care to patients who have nowhere else to turn. ■

Donor Profile

Coming together with joy and compassion

Sovereign Order of St. John Jerusalem Knights Hospitaller is an international community of volunteers steeped in a thousand-year-old tradition of helping those in need.

In Victoria, this action-oriented organization is made up of individuals who are passionate about serving our community. Continuing several years of supporting Cool Aid, Sovereign Order recently donated to the Peer Support and Food Services programs. Last winter, the organization

provided much-needed winter coats to the residents of Sandy Merriman House, our women's emergency shelter.

"The joy of seeing others helped" is a fundamental reason for members to join Sovereign Order.

Thank you to Sovereign Order and to all of our donors and volunteers for sharing your joy of giving. If you're a member of a service or social club that would like to consider supporting Cool Aid, please contact donate@coolaid.org.



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