



PEOPLE

OF CoolAid

SPRING 2023

You're giving vulnerable seniors a safe haven

At Cottage Grove, your support helps give seniors a safe home and the support they need to live with dignity, comfort, and self-reliance.

Gordie smiles as he sits in the sun-filled dining room at Cottage Grove. "I feel safe here," he says.

It wasn't always that way. Gordie struggled with addiction and homelessness for much of his life.

"Back in those days, no one was there for me," he shares.

All that changed when he found a safe, secure home of his own at Cottage Grove, Cool Aid's 45-unit supportive housing building for seniors.

Gordie is deeply grateful for the support of the Cottage Grove staff. When asked what Supervisor James Slack does to help him, he replies, "What doesn't he do?"

"He's always there to help you out. If I've got a problem, I'll go talk to him. He's a good man."

FINDING HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES

"Many of our tenants here have had hard lives," James Slack says. "We're there to give them the home and community they may never have had before."

As Supervisor at Cottage Grove, James' days are always full. They start with coffee shared with the tenants at 10 a.m. "It's a way to



touch base with them, see how they're doing, and also to have them build those relationships with each other."

Throughout the day, James makes sure everything in the building is running smoothly and lends support to the 45 tenants.

"Many of them experience physical or mental health challenges. We're there to help them with things like managing their time, budgeting, keeping their appointments organized," he says.

Tenants' health and well-being is a huge priority. Every day, James and his team partner with healthcare providers and other social service providers who visit to support the seniors.

A PLACE OF HEALING AND SUPPORT

James himself spends much of his time just listening to tenants like Gordie, supporting them through whatever challenges they face.

"As they age, they start to reflect. They may be feeling like they haven't done anything with their lives...that they have no one," he says. "They may be scared about what the rest of their lives will bring."

"We're here to show them that they have worth, that they have value. To help them live the rest of their lives feeling comfortable and secure."

A big part of that is reconnecting seniors with their families — often



A heartfelt farewell – but not goodbye

Dear friend,

It was the springtime of 2005 when I first walked through Cool Aid's doors, eager to support this incredible organization and the life-changing work it does.

Little did I know that I would soon be stepping into some very big shoes as CEO.

I've woken up every day since feeling both tremendous gratitude and a deep responsibility — for the people I have the privilege to work with, and the people we have the privilege to serve.

Please know that every day, I

have felt you walking alongside me on this journey. And I will never, ever forget that.

Your heartfelt support has seen us grow from a team of 144 people to over 380 amazing staff, working tirelessly to support neighbours at 21 housing, emergency shelter, health, and support service locations across our community.

Countless volunteers, community and corporate partners, and caring neighbours like you have always been at the heart of everything we do.

Each and every one of these passionate and dedicated people has made my role a true joy and privilege for all these years. I wish I could thank every one of you personally, but it would take hundreds of pages to express what's in my heart.

I leave my role with the assurance that caring people like you will continue to be there for our community's most vulnerable in the years to come. There are new and exciting things coming, thanks to your ongoing support — from a second mobile health clinic, to the upcoming Crosstown development.

Please know that this is not goodbye, but a heartfelt farewell. I will continue to be a lifelong supporter of Cool Aid, and I hope our paths will cross in our mutual support of its life-changing work.

With my heartfelt thanks,

Kathy Stinson
Chief Executive Officer

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after many, many years. "It's incredibly gratifying, to be a part of that," he says with a smile.

NURTURING DIGNITY, COMMUNITY, AND PRIDE

"We see this as a true community," James says. "Everyone has a role, everyone has value. We all respect each other, and we are all there for each other."

"We offer tenants an honorarium to help out around here, if they choose," he adds. "It gives them some income, but also a sense of purpose."

"I WISH YOU COULD SEE THE DIFFERENCE YOU'RE MAKING"

James is incredibly grateful for your support. "I wish you could see the difference you're making in seniors' lives here," he says. "We have an open-door policy. Please, come on in, say hello, see how you're helping people."

He hopes the community will continue to stand by seniors in need of support.

"Seniors come to our door, saying they can't afford rent anymore. We could fill up many Cottage Groves," he says. "We



need our community to keep being there for these folks. This is the time in their lives when they've never needed us more." ■

Life, light, and laughter return to the Downtown Community Centre

Ever since HeroWork transformed the DCC with the generous support of caring people like you, incredible things have been happening inside its doors!

“It’s unbelievable, the change. HeroWork has given us a new lease on life here. We’re able to offer so much more to the people we serve.”

Kathy Stinson, CEO of Cool Aid, stands outside the doors of the freshly-renovated Downtown Community Centre.

“People are really excited,” adds MK Bowen, Program Facilitator at the DCC. “Before, it was really dark. It felt small. Everyone who comes in now talks about how bright and open it is.”

The new doors are wider and open automatically. The bathroom stalls are fully accessible. The counters in the kitchen are at just the right height to accommodate program participants who use wheelchairs.

“It’s made it welcoming for everyone in the community,” MK says.



PEOPLE SEE THIS AS A PLACE FOR THEM

“We’ve seen a lot of new faces,” MK adds. “People walk by now, and they see that this is an inclusive space. A place for them.”

MK and the rest of the DCC team spend a lot of time building relationships with the people who come through their doors, helping to connect them with other life-changing services and supports, from healthcare to affordable housing.

“This is often the first door people open when they’re in need of help,” MK says. “And now it’s so much more welcoming, so more people are taking that first step.”

THE KITCHEN AT THE HEART OF IT ALL.

The bright, spacious new kitchen is already in full swing. “Before, it was so cramped, we had to shut down the whole Centre every time we did any cooking programs. Now, we can offer so many more food-related programs to the community,” MK says.

Now a spacious gathering place, the kitchen fills with neighbours gathering to learn, laugh, cook, and share meals — a vital lifeline at a time when food insecurity is at an all-time high.

NEW WAYS TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

The DCC team has been hard at work launching other new programs, taking full advantage



of the larger space and updated facilities.

“We’ve started a Peer Connections group, a journaling program, acupressure and chair massage...” MK says. The much-loved floor hockey program is kicking off again as well, bringing neighbours together in the bright new gym with its beautiful mountain mural wrapping around the walls.

In the coming months, MK and their colleagues have ambitious plans, including extending the DCC’s opening hours, welcoming smaller community organizations in to use the space, and working with community partners to develop programs for Indigenous community members.

“This is a place where people heal, recover, reconnect with themselves and the community,” MK says. “We’re so grateful that the community came together to make this place what it should be for our neighbours who need it.” ■

Nancy Taylor: A passion for making change in the community

Nancy Taylor joined the Cool Aid Board last September, bringing 30 years of experience in capacity development, governance, and skills training to her new role.

It was one particular experience — her role with the 2008 *Mayor's Task Force on Mental Illness, Addictions, and Homelessness* — that inspired her to play an active part in Cool Aid's mission.

"I worked closely with Cool Aid then, and I was so impressed with their commitment to their clients. They were leading the way on housing and services for the most vulnerable people in the community."

"The Board is a wonderful group of people with a collective commitment to Cool Aid's mission and its clients," Nancy says. "We all come from very different backgrounds and experiences, but everyone is warm, welcoming, and inclusive. Everyone embraces new learning and different views"

Nancy is especially committed to supporting Cool Aid's front-line teams. "I'm truly in awe of them. They work tirelessly on behalf of their clients under sometimes really



challenging conditions. As Board members, we want to ensure we're not just growing our services but also supporting the staff who are at the heart of those services."

Nancy encourages members of the

community with an interest in Cool Aid's mission to consider a role on the Board. We would benefit from more diversity on the Board — members with lived experience and different cultural experiences. Come join our conversation and help guide us".

If you would like to learn more about becoming a member of the Cool Aid Board and playing an active role in changing lives in our community, please visit <https://coolaid.org/who-we-are/our-team/>



210 Gorge Welcomes First Residents

At long last, our mixed-income development at 210 Gorge Road welcomed its first residents late last year. Aptly named, 210 Gorge, the building offers 51 units of affordable housing (with a range of rents) and 21 supportive units, along with a ground-level amenity space, beautiful garden area, and commercial space.

It is expected that the mixed-income approach will create an integrated community of working

singles, couples with low income, seniors, adults, and families.

"We are already seeing the positive impact of this unique project," said Cool Aid CEO, Kathy Stinson. Families, single people, seniors, and people who need supports are getting to know one another, which is having the desired effect of helping to reduce the stigma around homelessness and creating a sense of community for everyone who lives there."