



PEOPLE OF

CoolAid

WINTER 2024

You help boost nutrition—and well-being— with grocery gift cards

“You don’t know how much it means to be able to go out and choose your own food.”

That’s Ricky, a 64-year-old tenant in one of our supportive housing buildings, talking about the grocery gift card program that you help support.

Ricky worked as a fisherman until substance use took over his ability to care for himself. “Before I knew it, I’d lost my home and my car,” he remembers. When Ricky was housed nine years ago, he looked forward to having his own fridge and being able to cook.

He says, “These days, my money doesn’t go very far. The gift cards help me get through the week because I can pick up eggs or milk. They also give me the motivation to get to the store on days when I might just isolate inside.”

Since the program was launched in 2019, supporters like you have donated toward giving grocery gift cards to thousands of vulnerable people accessing emergency shelter, health care, and



“YOU DON’T KNOW HOW MUCH IT MEANS TO BE ABLE TO GO OUT AND CHOOSE YOUR OWN FOOD.”

employment programs. The cards are also distributed to residents of Cool Aid housing without food services.

Amanda Nurse, frontline supervisor at two of our supportive buildings, has seen the tremendous impact

gift cards make on tenants’ nutrition. She says, “Food banks provide staples like rice and pasta, which is great, but usually no dairy or meat. If someone receives a gift card, they can supplement their meals with vital protein, vegetables, and fruit.”

The gift cards also provide learning opportunities. “Our tenants have varying levels of life skills,” she explains. ▶

Home, health, and connection, *thanks to you*



Since joining Cool Aid a few months ago, I've been amazed by the ongoing generosity from our donor community.

Whether contributing toward services at our supportive housing sites or making a donation that provides grocery

gift cards to people in need, you've made an important difference—thank you.

While reading this newsletter, perhaps you'll be inspired to join our 2024 "Everyone Deserves to Smile" campaign", to ensure life-changing dental care for people living on low incomes.

Last year, supporters like you rallied together with HeroWork, transforming the Downtown Community Centre into a functional, welcoming space. Now, even more people can come in and get warm, use the accessible washrooms, and participate in triple the number of programs we used to offer.

This year, your support will go to employment assistance and placement as well as social and recreational opportunities.

And later in the year, as residents settle into our largest project to date at Crosstown, your generosity will help to support a teaching kitchen and other communal spaces to help them thrive.

As the need for supportive and affordable housing grows, I ask that you continue to be at the heart of our vision where no one is forced to sleep on the street and everyone has the dignity that comes with home, health, and connection.

Thank you,

A blue ink handwritten signature of Elin Bjarnason, which is stylized and cursive.

Elin Bjarnason
Chief Executive Officer

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"I'll often go shopping with them, help choose nutritious choices, and share easy recipes. It makes everyone feel great to learn something new that they can do for themselves. We also talk about foods that could affect certain health issues, like diabetes."

Amanda points out that going to a food bank carries a stigma for many residents.

"But with the gift card, they're like anyone else at the grocery store. Besides a better diet, the gift cards give dignity, choice, and a boost to our clients' mental health."

Thank you for helping to place grocery gift cards into the hands of people who need them most. As Ricky says, "I'm very grateful. They really help me get by."



How you help empower clients: “Here, I’m part of something.”

“At Cool Aid, we meet people where they’re at,” Warren Bailey says. “So when clients told us they needed more opportunities to talk openly about their struggles, we organized a peer connections group at the Downtown Community Centre.”

As the group’s facilitator, Warren leads the weekly lunchtime sessions made up of participants dealing with homelessness, substance use, and poverty. “This group is close to my heart,” he adds. “I’ve been sober for seven years and I know how important it is to build trust and share your story with like-minded people.”

The peer connections members meet around a table in the gym of the DCC, enjoying sandwiches, juice, and each other’s company. Mike, a regular



who describes himself as “in recovery” says, “Coming gives me something to look forward to. I’m an introvert and it’s hard to talk, but here I’m part of something. I’m not isolated anymore.”

For members fighting to stay sober—but not comfortable attending other groups—peer support provides an

accessible alternative. “It’s all about listening, respect, and empowerment. And we’re right in the middle of town. Everyone is welcome,” Warren says.

You help make client-centred programs a reality at the DCC and throughout our community. Thank you for your generous support. ■

Your **Generosity** in Action

Here’s the profound difference you made in 2023—thank you!



4,500

**GROCERY
GIFT CARDS
GIVEN OUT**



7,710

**AFFORDABLE
DENTAL TREATMENTS
PROVIDED**



125

**SHELTER BEDS
WERE FULL
365 DAYS/YEAR**



640

**PEOPLE WERE
AFFORDABLY
HOUSED**

Dental care and a reason to smile— thanks to you

February 1st kicks off our month-long “Everyone Deserves to Smile” campaign to raise money for the Cool Aid Dental Clinic, supporting low-income adults.

Poor oral health can lead to serious health issues and dramatically reduce confidence, making it difficult to find housing and work. For vulnerable people challenged

with complex issues like mental health and homelessness, the cost of dental care is prohibitive, leading to more pain, oral disease, and stigma.

Our dental clinic sees more than 5,000 patients a year, and the need is increasing.

Most of our patients have some government subsidy, though it often does not cover the full cost of procedures.

About 20% of patients have no benefits at all.

This is where you come in. By supporting the 2024 “Everyone Deserves to Smile” campaign, you’ll ensure more people in need receive urgent dental care. Donate at coolaid.org.

It’s always joyful to share a smile, but we can’t do it without you!

Donor Profile

“It’s a tremendous joy to help others,” says Paul Hammond.

Paul is a partner at Low Hammond Rowe Architects, the Victoria firm that designed and is currently developing Cool Aid’s soon-to-be-open Crosstown community that will include 100 affordable apartments and 54 supportive suites.

He’s also a committed donor. “When we met with the residents who’ll be moving into Crosstown from the existing motel on site, some told us their stories. Usually, a heartbreaking series of events led to homelessness or substance use. Despite

Meet Paul Hammond



their suffering, they’re resilient. They’ve inspired me to get more involved at Cool Aid. That’s why my partners and I are donors.”

Paul sees the power of donations firsthand. “A gift of \$10 or \$20 will give comfort by providing a hot meal or a

grocery gift card to someone in need,” he says.

Through his work on Crosstown, Paul has become more familiar with the range of complex services that our supporters make possible. “I knew of Cool Aid’s long history as a housing provider, but there are also meal programs, mobile health clinics, affordable dental care, and recreational opportunities at the Downtown Community Centre,” he explains. “Cool Aid has made a significant impact here in Victoria for more than 50 years. **Without donors like you and me, thousands more would be struggling.**”