



PEOPLE OF

CoolAid

FALL 2023

Thank you for encouraging beautiful new beginnings at 210 Gorge Road

Housing is key to changing lives and creating safer communities.

“Every story in this building is beautiful.”

That’s Steven Karlsson, Cool Aid’s manager of housing and shelters, talking about our newest mixed-use building at 210 Gorge Road.

“Let me tell you about just one resident,” he says.

“Before moving into 210 Gorge, a woman I’ll call Rosa was homeless for more than five years. She’d been living in a tent and was very stressed, always on high alert for her safety. When Rosa unlocked the door and walked into her new apartment for the first time, she burst into tears. She was finally home. Soon, she was reconnecting with family and now her children can visit and stay overnight because it’s safe for them too.”

Steven has been homeless himself, so he can relate to many of the people who call 210 Gorge home. “Agencies like Cool Aid get you on a better path. Look where I am today,” he says.

Cool Aid’s newest apartment building features both affordable and supportive housing, with wheelchair-accessible units. Mental health care workers are on site 24 hours a day.

A COFFEE SHOP AND A GARDENING PROJECT STRENGTHEN THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

“People from very different backgrounds live here together. There is no stigma and everyone is respected,” Steven says.

The five-storey building is located in the Burnside Gorge community and now also features



a coffee shop.

“Cool Aid believes in connecting people through health care, outreach, and housing. It’s a priority. The coffee shop is just another way to build that connection between tenants and the rest of the community,” adds Tracey Robertson, community engagement manager.

A new gardening partnership is also cultivating that sense of community.

A message from Elin

I'm very pleased to send you our fall edition of the *People of Cool Aid* and to introduce myself.

As the new CEO of this exceptionally caring organization, I'm honoured to work with dedicated staff, volunteers, donors, and our community partners. Thank you for sharing the vision that drives all of our life-changing services: a city where no one is forced to sleep on the street or go hungry—and everyone has the dignity that comes with home, health, and connection.

I have called Victoria home since 1986. My passion for serving our community began in 1988 as a crisis line volunteer and then as a board member at the Victoria Sexual Assault Center and has continued throughout my over 35-year career as a health care provider and executive leader. Helping people in need, like many of our neighbours who turn to Cool Aid, has been my life's work.

People are struggling. The costs of rent and groceries have skyrocketed. Even people with full-time jobs are fighting to pay their bills, keep food on the table, and have a roof over



their heads.

In the face of these significant challenges, you're helping deliver much-needed services like our mobile health clinic, which you can read about in this newsletter. You're also the reason that our housing project at 210 Gorge (see our cover story) is now welcoming residents who've been traumatized by homelessness and poverty. Thank you for everything you make possible.

With Thanksgiving and colder weather on the way, I hope you'll keep the people we serve in your heart. Please donate a grocery gift card to ensure one more family can sit down and enjoy a nourishing meal together.

Wishing you and yours a joyful Thanksgiving,

A blue ink handwritten signature of Elin Bjarnason, written in a cursive style.

Elin Bjarnason
Chief Executive Officer

...continued from page 1

Last summer, Cool Aid made available several raised garden beds on the property to neighbours. By July, you could spot tomatoes, beans, lettuce, and cucumbers practically spilling out of their boxes.

GROWING FOOD AND FRIENDSHIPS.

Tracey says, "People can grow their own food and get to know each other. This is a big deal for our residents, especially those who were homeless. They were often treated as 'other' and

felt ostracized. Now they belong. They're part of a community."

Thank you for supporting our clients as they find sanctuary and begin to heal from homelessness and other challenges. Your generosity makes our neighbourhoods safer and more vibrant. As you read this, another 233 affordable apartments are being developed. ■

A new gardening partnership is also cultivating that sense of community.

Here's how you take health care on the road

When Candide Dias opens the door of Cool Aid's newest mobile health clinic, powered by TELUS Health, you can see a fully outfitted doctor's office, with an examination table, and a small reception area — a doctor's office on wheels!

Candide is the coordinator of our outreach health services. She says, **“Donors are the reason we can take health care to folks living on the street who are struggling with addiction, mental health issues, and ongoing physical challenges. In many cases, our patients don't recognize how unwell they are. Wound care is especially important for our homeless patients because injuries can quickly become serious blood-borne infections.”**

The mobile clinic team is able to treat patients almost anywhere, whether it's in a parking lot, outside a bottle depot, or a supportive housing site. “The homeless population in Victoria has probably doubled since the start of the pandemic. There is so much need for health care, but the marginalized patients we see often face barriers and stigmatization when it comes to accessing traditional healthcare,” Candide explains.

Cool Aid's mobile health team is trained to provide trauma-informed care to people in crisis. Candide says, “That means we build relationships with our patients. We keep a consistent schedule and the patients get to know us. We meet people where they're at, with no judgment.”

She adds, “We've seen a lot of people with stable housing become homeless because of renovations.



It can happen to almost anyone these days.”

From the van, doctors and nurses can do anything normally done in a brick and mortar office, including blood work, renew prescriptions and make referrals to specialists. They also have access to electronic medical records.

By funding the mobile health clinic, donors like you are helping provide immediate care to marginalized people who might otherwise end up in the hospital. “Victoria is in a health care emergency. The mobile clinic provides excellent care and it saves hospitals time and money,” Candide says.

Thank you for supporting the vital work of our mobile health clinic team. They're on the road because of you. ■

Your **Generosity** in Action

Here's the difference you've helped make in the last year:



7,710
DENTAL
TREATMENTS



61,974
MEDICAL
ENCOUNTERS



1,493
COUNSELLING
ENCOUNTERS

You made the Homecoming Challenge a stellar success!



A HUGE thank you to everyone—matching sponsors, donors, media partners—who came together to make our 2023 Homecoming Matching Challenge a resounding success!

More than \$175,000 was raised in July to help build new homes, connect to the community, and provide much-needed health care to our marginalized neighbours.

As always, your compassion and kindness make our work possible and enable us to reach more people in need every day.

COMING SOON!

Cool Aid is in the final stages of construction at Crosstown, our latest mixed-use development in Victoria. This fall, we're launching a Crosstown capital campaign to raise \$2 million to provide onsite support services, job training, life skills, community connections, and health care. To find out how you can support this innovative project, please call or email Mary Lee Crocker: 250-414-4799 / mleecrocker@coolaid.org

Donate a Thanksgiving meal to a neighbour in need

As we live through the hardest time many of us have ever experienced, we're thankful for the simplest gifts—like sharing a nourishing meal with loved ones.

Everyone deserves the joy of a special Thanksgiving dinner, but many people here in Victoria are struggling with food insecurity.

For just \$25, you can give a vulnerable neighbour the chance to prepare and share nutritious dishes with the people they care about.

In this season of giving, please donate a grocery gift card at: coolaid.org/ways-to-help/buy-a-giftcard/. Thank you for donating with your heart!

“When a client receives a grocery card from a nurse, doctor, or outreach worker, they start trusting them and are more likely to come to follow-up health care appointments. Thank you to our donors for helping build such positive relationships.”

— COOL AID NURSING TEAM



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